

Eastern Redbud



This article was written by: Warren Banks, Dakota County Master Gardener

This begins a series of articles focusing on the category of trees called the ornamentals. Although the definition of an ornamental tree is left up to the horticulturist, the nursery owner, or the homeowner, we will identify an ornamental tree as any small tree with multi-seasonal interest. It is a tree that finds a place in any landscape, urban, suburban, or rural, that needs an attractive accent in a smaller location. There are a number of trees hardy in Minnesota that fit this category such as the Amur Choke Cherry, the Hawthorn, and the Japanese Tree Lilac, but this first in a series of articles will describe what Michael A. Dirr's book, Hardy Trees and Shrubs, describes as "having no equal, no competitor", the Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), a member of the pea family, Leguminosae.

Zone 4 is the northern most range for the Eastern Redbud. When the tree was beginning to be widely planted in the area, there was concern about its hardiness. But most of the winter-related dieback problems were on trees brought into the state from Missouri and Texas. If you want to purchase a Redbud for your landscape, be sure to ask the provenance of the specimen; the source of the seed. Be sure it comes from Minnesota or Wisconsin.

The strengths and attributes of this tree are many. There are the masses of magenta buds in April followed by rosy pink pea-like flowers on leafless branches. The young heart-shaped leaves unfold with a reddish cast and turn into a dark bluish-green color and finally turn a clear yellow in the fall. It develops 2-4" brown seed pods which last all winter. It is tolerant of partial shade; in fact, it does very well as an understudy tree or placed next to woods. This tree entertains the landscape all year long. Not only does it have beauty, but it also exhibits character. It tolerates high or low pH and a moist or dry environment. Transplant them in the spring. Balled-and bur lapped, container or bare root trees are available at local nurseries. The Arboretum has a list of the sources. Now, nothing is perfect; it does have a couple of weaknesses. It almost always has weak crotches. But because the tree stays small, 15-20' high and 20-25' wide, it doesn't lose too many branches unless the neighborhood gremlins decide to use it playing Tarzan and Jane. Also, if the tree is extremely stressed, verticillium wilt and stem cankers could become a problem. There are no insect problems. As Dirr noted in his Manual of Landscape plants, this is "a native tree with a touch of class".