



Township of Bernards Shade Tree Commission

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The Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)

The redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is readily identified in April when pink flowers appear all over the tree even on old branches and sometimes on the trunk before leafing out. At peak bloom time the tree appears to be a pink cloud; one can barely see the branches. A nightmare assignment would be counting the number of blossoms on a tree and validating the results. Aside from the spring bloom it can be identified by its perfect heart shaped leaf, 3-5 inches (7-12 cm) wide and the 'bean like' seed pod a few inches long containing 3-8 seeds. Seed pods stay on the tree for a while and then are dispersed by wind. Seedlings may appear here and there throughout the garden in soft soil and window wells. The roots penetrate quickly far into the ground and are hard to weed out. If the top is cut off the roots generate a new plant the following year. Propagation from seed is a sure thing and would be a good experiment to do with the children: collect pods, allow to dry, remove seeds, refrigerate for three months, and sow.

Redbud is a native North American tree whose range is from southern Ontario, Canada, on southward to the non-coastal areas of the eastern states and the Midwestern states as far south as Texas and some parts of northern Mexico. It is an understory tree in the native forests and grows to about 30 feet (9 m) high and wide.

The popularity of redbud has surged in recent years for several reasons. Aside from the April color blast it is a nice sized plant for the landscape sometimes being the feature plant in the smaller landscape. Also, there a lot of new variations available thanks to the hybridizers and the identification of natural variants. Attributes of the cultivars include improved branch structure and form and new flower colors, pure pink or purple pink (mauve) and even white. Leaf colors include white variegation of various kinds to dark reddish purple. There are also a weeping forms, 'Ruby Falls', is strongly weeping and has very dark purplish

red leaves. Canker is the main disease of the species; it disfigures the tree and makes it non-useful in the landscape. Cultivars have better and fuller branch structures making them a better choice for the garden.

A really neat slower growing and super blooming redbud is the non-native *Cercis chinensis* 'Don Egolf'. It grows to only 8 x 6 feet high and wide.