
Wildflower Spot – July 2019

John Clayton Chapter of the Virginia Native Plant Society

EASTERN REDBUD

Cercis canadensis

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Those showy pink-magenta blossoms along the roadsides are one of the sure signs of spring. Now at the start of summer, the flowers have been replaced by bean-like seed pods that stay on the tree throughout the winter.

Eastern redbud is a strikingly conspicuous tree in the spring because it flowers before



other tree leaves form. Pollination is usually accomplished by long-tongued bees. Two or three weeks later, the flowers drop off and smooth, heart-shaped leaves appear, which are eaten by the caterpillars of some species of moths and butterflies.

Typically, redbud is a small tree 15-30 ft. tall, growing best on moist, well-drained sites. It does not transplant well and should be installed in new sites when young. This tree works well in naturalized settings or as a lawn tree. Disease and insect pests can be avoided by regular watering and fertilization and by pruning out dead branches as needed.

Eastern redbud grows in rich woods throughout eastern U.S. and Canada and is found in nearly every county in Virginia.

The flower bud, flowers and young pods are edible, added to salads or cooked as a vegetable. Widely planted as an ornamental, redbud wood is heavy, hard, and close-grained, but because of the small size and zigzag branching, it is of no commercial value as a source of lumber.

The genus name “Cercis” comes from a Greek work that refers to a weaver’s shuttle since each seed pod resembles the shuttle used by weavers. The species name indicates Canada as part of this tree’s native range. ❖

Photo: Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) taken by Helen Hamilton
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