

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*)

Nebraska Forest Service

Eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is one of the first trees to flower in the spring of the year. It is a native to the eastern and central hardwood forest regions and is found in most of Iowa and Missouri and in the southeast part of Nebraska.

Redbud is the Oklahoma state tree. In the 1930s, Mrs. Mamie Lee Robinson Browne was president of the Oklahoma City Federation of Women's Clubs. She was a huge fan of the redbud tree and proposed to Governor E. W. Marland that eastern redbud be made the state tree. The Governor was about to sign the redbud bill in March of 1937, when he was interrupted by a telegram from Mrs. Edward Campbell Lawson of Tulsa, president of the National Federation of Women's Clubs. Mrs. Campbell Lawson was not a redbud fan and she told the Governor that the redbud was actually the "Judas tree," on which Judas Iscariot had hanged himself in long-ago Jordan.



The controversy raged on and was even carried in the national press. But Mr. John Y. Iskian, an Oklahoma City resident and a native of Jerusalem resolved the dispute. He affirmed that there was no connection between Oklahoma's eastern redbud and Israel's "Judas tree." The "Judas tree" known in the Mediterranean region is *Cercis siliquastrum*. The redbud was officially made the Oklahoma state tree in March of 1937.

The tree has been planted extensively as a landscape tree in Nebraska. In the late 1950's the Lions Club in Tekamah, Nebraska took on a project to plant redbud throughout the town. Seedlings were purchased and members actually planted many of the trees. The tradition was continued in subsequent years when local banks would purchase redbud seedlings and hand them out to customers and school children. Many of these trees can still be found in Tekamah and they are quite visible in the early spring.

In its natural setting eastern redbud is what foresters may call an edge tree - a tree that enjoys life at the edge of the forest where it can get just enough sun to survive and reproduce. Redbud is shade tolerant meaning that it can survive in shaded conditions. It prefers a well-drained soil that is rich in organic material. Planting redbud in heavy clay and full sun is not advised. The best locations to plant redbud would be on east facing slopes or in partially shaded, mature lawns.



Early settlers sometimes used redbud blossoms as a salad food. Redbud bark was used to treat common maladies and sometimes even leukemia. But the striking springtime beauty of the redbud flowers may be its greatest asset.

Redbud has a simple heart shaped leaf and the bark is gray, thin and smooth. As the tree matures, the bark may begin to scale off in small plates. It is not the buds but the flowers

of the redbud that are actually red. Redbud is a legume and produces seeds in small pods. Seeds can be collected, started in a pot and then planted. As a matter of fact, some nursery growers are collecting seed from trees that have grown here in Nebraska. This will help produce a stronger, healthier tree for Nebraska's harsh climate.