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## WESTERN REDBUDS

Pauline Kuklis, Placer County Master Gardener

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Are you looking for a showy California Native that will bring interest to your landscape all year round?

If so, be sure to check out the beautiful **Western Redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*)**. Each year they are one of the earliest trees to flower, and are a great way to add color to your landscape.

In early spring you will be awed by magenta-pink clusters of pea shaped flowers which cover the branches for several months. After the flowers drop, you will enjoy a mass of 2-3 inch dangling heart-shaped leaves throughout the summer.

In early summer the branches are also decorated with magenta seedpods.

Come autumn, the foliage turns bright yellow or red.

Finally, toward late fall the leaves gradually drop, and the bare branches of winter are covered with interesting reddish brown seedpods which usually hang on until spring.

Given the year-round show they provide, you can understand why Western Redbuds are exceptionally popular ornamental trees!

Western Redbuds can be pruned to a multi-trunk canopy tree or left as a many-branched shrub. They can reach a mature size of 20 feet tall and 15 feet wide, but often only reach about half that height when growing in the dry California foothills and valley floors.

Western Redbuds are hardy trees (or shrubs) that like full sun to light shade. They are quite drought-tolerant and prefer limited, deep summer irrigation.

In addition, they are resistant to oak root fungus, and tolerate clay soils with a pH of 5.5 to 8. Once established, they are quite reliable, with the exception of occasional tent caterpillar attacks (control by spraying).

Pruning should be done during the dormant season or after bloom, and some winter chill is required for them to achieve their best floral display.

The UC Davis Arboretum features some particularly nice plantings. The Warren G. Roberts Redbud Collection is a grove of Western redbuds, small multi-trunked trees that produce clouds of magenta-pink blossoms in early spring.

Now that you have learned a bit about Western Redbuds, here are some additional items of interest to add to your trivia base:

- *Cercis* is a genus of 6-10 species in the subfamily Caesalpinioideae of the pea family Fabaceae—**yes, they are a member of the pea family!**
- They are great for bird and butterfly gardens and help to attract beneficial insects.
- *Cercis* species are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including Mouse Moth.
- Their flowers and fruit are edible! Native Americans roasted seed pods for food. In Mexico, the flowers of

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#### PLACER COUNTY

11477 E Avenue  
Auburn, CA 95603  
(530) 889-7385

E-Mail: [ceplacer@ucdavis.edu](mailto:ceplacer@ucdavis.edu)

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255 So Auburn  
Grass Valley, CA 95945  
(530) 273-4563

E-Mail: [cenevada@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cenevada@ucdavis.edu)

redbud are fried and eaten. John Lawson wrote of redbud flowers being used in salads in his History of North Carolina, published in 1708.

- Native Americans also used the leaves for incense and the wood to make bows.
- In addition, young fall redbud branches were highly valued by Native American basket weavers for their wine-red coloring
- The white inner sapwood of young spring branches is prized as weft wood.
- Redbud has been called the Judas tree because Judas Iscariot, after betraying Christ, was said to have hanged himself on *Cercis siliquastrum*, a close relative of eastern redbud that grows in Europe and western Asia. The blooms of the tree, originally white, were said to have turned pink with shame or blood.
- Redbud is the state tree of Oklahoma.

### References

<http://www.ipm.ucdavis.edu/PMG/GARDEN/PLANTS/redbud.html>

[http://ag.arizona.edu/pima/gardening/aridplants/Cercis\\_occidentalis.html](http://ag.arizona.edu/pima/gardening/aridplants/Cercis_occidentalis.html)

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*E-Mail:* [cenevada@ucdavis.edu](mailto:cenevada@ucdavis.edu)

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