

"Judas" Tree for Eastertide.

Along margins of woods and in yards Eastern redbuds are blooming. Their bright pink blossoms do start out as red buds. These trees are members of the bean family (Leguminosae), one of the largest families of flowering plants. This family includes many tree species, as well as vines, shrubs and small herbs. There are many commercially important legumes including soybean, one of the world's largest cash crops.

**Red"buds". Flowers often grow straight out of trunks and branches.
Botanically speaking, such flowers are "cauliferous"!**



Why would redbud trees also be called "Judas trees"? According to legend, Judas Iscariot hanged himself from a closely related species native to Europe and the middle east *Cercis siliquastrum*. A woodcut by Castor Durante (1529 ? 1590) has the figure of Judas Iscariot suspended from one of the branches, Our native species the Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is Oklahoma's state tree. It has a wide range throughout the eastern U. S. and as the scientific name indicates, extends into Canada. Some also grow in parts of Texas and Mexico. They are relatively small trees that grow under a canopy of larger forest species.

Flowers of redbuds are typical for bean family species. They have five petals, one "standard" petal, flanked by two wing petals, and two "keel" petals that clasp and enclose the male and female parts. The flowers attract and are pollinated by insects (bees and moths), so they are not "spring fever" or allergy culprits.

Flowers are edible and have a nutty flavor, and can be added to pancakes and salads. Tender young fruits (pods) are also tasty when cooked and buttered. Birds, squirrels and deer feed upon redbud seeds and flowers are considered important for honey production. As a medicinal, redbud bark tea has been used an astringent for treatment of dysentery. Redbud branches of this versatile tree have also used to dye wool a nankeen (yellow) color.

Redbuds "opened" demonstrating typical legume (pea) flower structure.



Redbuds are great to plant as ornamentals, because they tolerate a wide range of conditions and are not very vulnerable to insect pests or disease. New varieties of redbud have been developed including a white blooming tree (*Cercis canadensis var. alba*). Another variety is the "forest pansy" redbud which produces purple leaves after its pink blossoms.

Judas tree blooming on campus of Erskine College, Due West, SC.



