



Cercis mexicana Mexican Redbud¹

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INTRODUCTION

Mexican Redbud is a moderate to rapid-grower when young, reaching a height of 18 to 25 feet (Fig. 1). The splendid purple-pink flowers appear all over the tree in spring, just before the leaves emerge. Leaves are considerably smaller than those on Texas Redbud and Eastern Redbud, and the edges are distinctly undulating. Mexican Redbud has an irregular growth habit when young but forms a graceful flat-topped vase-shape as it gets older. The tree usually branches low on the trunk, and if left intact forms a graceful multi-trunked habit. It and Texas Redbud are the best suited Redbuds for western and central Texas and Oklahoma.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: *Cercis mexicana*

Pronunciation: SER-sis meck-sih-KAY-nuh

Common name(s): Mexican Redbud

Family: *Leguminosae*

USDA hardiness zones: 6B through 8 (Fig. 2)

Origin: native to North America

Uses: container or above-ground planter; large parking lot islands (> 200 square feet in size); wide tree lawns (>6 feet wide); medium-sized parking lot islands (100-200 square feet in size); medium-sized tree lawns (4-6 feet wide); recommended for buffer strips around parking lots or for median strip plantings in the highway; near a deck or patio; reclamation plant; shade tree; small parking lot islands (< 100 square feet in size); narrow tree lawns (3-4 feet wide); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree

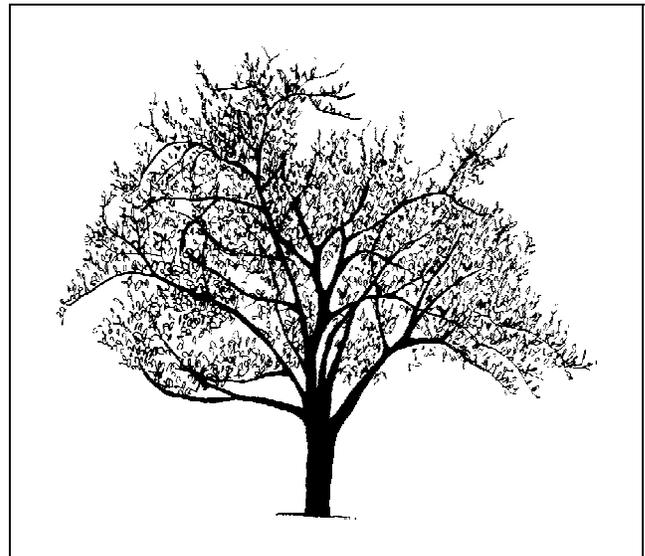


Figure 1. Mature Mexican Redbud.

Availability: somewhat available, may have to go out of the region to find the tree

DESCRIPTION

Height: 18 to 25 feet

Spread: 18 to 25 feet

Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette

Crown shape: round; vase shape

Crown density: open

Growth rate: slow

Texture: coarse

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Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate (Fig. 3)

Leaf type: simple

Leaf margin: entire; undulate

Leaf shape: cordate; orbiculate; ovate

Leaf venation: palmate; reticulate

Leaf type and persistence: deciduous

Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches

Leaf color: green

Fall color: yellow

Fall characteristic: showy

Flower

Flower color: pink

Flower characteristics: spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: pod

Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches

Fruit covering: dry or hard

Fruit color: brown

Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; no significant litter problem; persistent on the tree; showy

Trunk and Branches

Trunk/bark/branches: bark is thin and easily damaged from mechanical impact; droop as the tree grows, and will require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy; routinely grown with, or trainable to be grown with, multiple trunks; not particularly showy; tree wants to grow with several trunks but can be trained to grow with a single trunk; no thorns

Pruning requirement: requires pruning to develop strong structure

Breakage: susceptible to breakage either at the crotch due to poor collar formation, or the wood itself is weak and tends to break

Current year twig color: brown

Current year twig thickness: medium

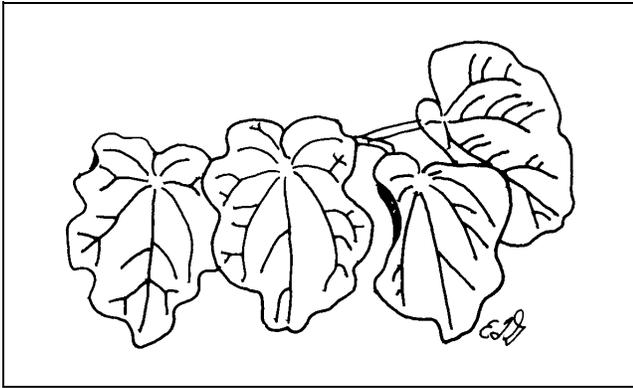


Figure 3. Foliage of Mexican Redbud.

Culture

Light requirement: tree grows in part shade/part sun;
tree grows in full sun

Soil tolerances: clay; loam; sand; acidic; alkaline;
well-drained

Drought tolerance: high

Aerosol salt tolerance: none

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem

Winter interest: no special winter interest

Outstanding tree: tree has outstanding ornamental
features and could be planted more

Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time

Verticillium wilt susceptibility: susceptible

Pest resistance: long-term health usually not
affected by pests

USE AND MANAGEMENT

Be sure to avoid weak forks by pruning to reduce the size of lateral branches and save those which form a 'U'-shaped crotch, not a 'V'. Keep them less than half the diameter of the main trunk to increase longevity of the tree. Do not allow multiple trunks to grow with tight crotches, instead space branches about 6 to 10 inches apart along a main trunk. Yellow (although somewhat variable and unreliable) fall color and tolerance to partial shade make this a suitable, attractive tree for understory or specimen planting. Best not used extensively as a street tree due to low disease resistance and short life, but is nice in commercial and residential landscapes. Plant in a shrub border for a spring and fall color display.

Mexican Redbuds grow well in full sun in the northern part of its range but can benefit from some shade in the southern zones, particularly in the lower

mid-west where summers are hot. Best growth occurs in a light, rich, moist soil but it adapts well to a variety of soil including sandy or alkaline. It grows well in its native habitat on limestone soils. Trees look better when they receive some irrigation in summer dry spells, especially if they are located in a restricted soil space. Trees are sold as single or multi-stemmed. Young trees are easiest to transplant and survive best when planted in the spring or fall. Containerized trees can be planted anytime. The beans provide food for some birds. Trees are often short-lived but provide a wonderful show in the spring and fall.

Cercis are best propagated by seed. Use ripe seed to plant directly, or, if seed has been stored, stratification is necessary before sowing in a greenhouse. Cultivars can be propagated by grafting onto seedlings, or by summer cuttings under mist or in a greenhouse.

Pests

Borers attack the trunk of older and stressed Redbuds. Keep the plant vigorous.

Scale insects can usually be controlled with horticultural sprays.

Webworm can defoliate parts of the tree in summer and fall.

Diseases

Canker is the biggest problem with Redbud. Dieback begins as a canker on a branch. The cankers, at first small and sunken, enlarge to girdle the branch. Bark in the canker turns black and a crack forms between diseased and healthy bark. The fungus enters through wounds or dead and dying branches. Once girdled, the part of the stem beyond the canker wilts and dies. There is no chemical control. Prune out diseased branches.

Leaf spots can be a problem during wet weather. Since the disease is rarely serious, no chemical controls are suggested.

Verticillium wilt attacks and kills Redbud.