

Spotlight on State Tree of Oklahoma – The Eastern Redbud

The redbud tree is one of the most easily recognizable trees found in this area. It has heart-shaped leaves and distinctive magenta flowers; although its flowers can be white, light pink, or lavender.

Like the people of the state it represents, the redbud is very resilient. People often comment on how well they make it through drought, heat, high winds, and ice storms. They also don't often succumb to diseases in this area, and can thrive in sun or shade, acidic or alkaline soils.

This year, however, we have noticed a lot of redbuds in Norman struggling. Here are a few things to think about if you see one of our state trees in distress:

- 1) ¹⁾ Despite being very hardy plants, they have not welcomed the ample rains we have had this year. They do not do well when the roots are excessively wet for prolonged periods. Do not over-water and make sure the ground at the root system is not constantly moist.
- 2) ²⁾ Studies suggest that redbuds have a relatively low tolerance for not only flooding, but also salinity. This is difficult to determine without a water test. In some cases, researchers report a 50% reduction of growth due high levels of salinity. Some symptoms of this issue are leggy growth, edge burn on the leaves, leaf curl, and leaf drop.
- 3) ³⁾ Also, since redbuds are in the legume family, they affix nitrogen into the soil. Therefore, excessive nitrogen fertilization is rarely necessary and it can cause copper and manganese deficiencies.
- 4) Some research indicates that using clover or sorghum cover crops have the potential for allelopathic competition, in which the plants distribute chemicals into the soil that prevent other plants from growing. It is not recommended to grow clover or sorghum around redbud trees.
- 5) ⁵⁾ Redbuds can be damaged by chemical drift. If you or your neighbors spray chemicals on their plants or yard, encourage them to be careful and request that they avoid using the “ester” form of pesticides which are more likely to damage your redbuds. Symptoms of exposure to harmful chemicals in a redbud include leaf curling, stem and petiole twisting, leaves that grow straight down from the twig or stem, and frilly-looking leaf edges.

These hardy trees are a fantastic addition to the urban landscape. Let try to keep one of our state symbols healthy!