

May 2014 Plant of the Month



Cercis canadensis L., Red Bud

The May *Plant of the Month* is red bud, *Cercis canadensis*. Red bud is one of our early flowering trees, appearing in late April and early May. Red bud is a common sight in the residential landscape where it is often used with its non-native Asiatic cousins to brighten the spring suburban sub canopy. Our species, although frequently used as an ornamental, is actually a rare plant. New Jersey Natural Heritage Program ranks red bud as a endangered species (S1,E). Its native New Jersey habitat is along the high rocky slopes above the Delaware River in Hunterdon County. It may also have native populations in the upper Raritan River in Somerset County. It has escaped and produced viable populations throughout the rest of the state, specifically in Camden and Atlantic counties.

Red bud is one of the woody legumes, and is a member of the Fabaceae or Leguminosae, the pea family. Fernald's taxonomy placed *Cercis* in the subfamily Mimosoideae. Modern researchers have found different direct relationships, and place the genus *Cercis* in its own sub family, the Cercideae (APG13). Like all peas, it creates seeds in legumes, the flat, bean like structure that is produced in clusters after the flowers mature. Its seed is a flat, hard, dark brown with a winged margin. Unlike many flowering trees, red bud does not last long. Its beautiful magenta flowers last but for a week before the display of blossoms darken and fall to the ground. Make the best of this cold, wet spring and brighten your day this May by finding red bud before it paces us by for yet another season.

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