

REDBUDS, A VIRGINIA FAVORITE

This small native tree is one of the first heralds of spring when its rosy buds emerge against grey bark, brightening the winter dark of surrounding woods. It can be overlooked as it is a modest tree and in the years we have had no real winter but just varying degrees of spring, its charm is unappreciated.

That may change: the redbud, *Cercis Canadensis*, has had a stylish makeover! Even in their original green the heart-shaped leaves are a delight but they are now fashionably purple in C.c. 'Forest Pansy' and bright gold in 'Hearts of Gold'. 'Forest Pansy' has early leaves of bright purple that become more sedate as the season continues. It requires shade to protect that rare color and can be grown as a shrub or shaped as a tree by judicious pruning when it is young.

To attain that spectacular gold, the redbud 'Hearts of gold' must be planted in sun. I haven't seen it but from the picture in Fairweather Gardens catalog it appears to be that magic color Robert Frost described in "Nothing gold Can Stay", "Nature's first green is gold, Her hardest hue to hold."

Dwarf redbuds, ten to 12 feet, have filled a need and two new ones are currently available, *C.canadensis* 'Ace of Hearts' and 'Little Woody'. Both of these have purple flowers and great fall color but 'Little Woody' has unusual leaves. They are ruffled, rugose, and grow in interesting bunches. Equally unusual is the weeping redbud C.c. 'Covey', named for the person in whose garden it was discovered as a sport of a redbud deciding to grow in an umbrella shape.

If your space is limited and blessed with shade, *Cercis c.* 'Silver Cloud' would brighten that shade. The flowers are reddish purple but the leaves are splotted with creamy white. North Carolina State University's J.C.Raulston Arboretum has a redbud program that has developed new flower and foliage forms and colors. Perhaps they will have a breakthrough with the rare *Cercis racemosa* (a lovely thing with flowers in long pink chains) and make it easier to grow?

Another species that is becoming the belle of the horticultural ball is the Smoke Tree. I had one a long time ago but unfortunately planted it in a place that became the shortest distance between the house and barn. It was adequate but never was very 'smoky'. *Cotinus coggygria* is native to China and the Mediterranean region as well as to the Southern U.S. The curious cluster of small twigs at the branch ends 'bloom'-go to seed- with a smoky effect.

The *Cotinus americanus*, syn. *obovatus*, is also called American Smoke Tree or Chittamwood. It has attractive bark and long oval leaves that are pinkish bronze in spring flaming to orange, red and purple in fall. This species can be 30 feet tall so it doesn't appear commercially with the frequency of *C. coggygria*. A new *C. coggygria* introduction from the Netherlands 'Young Lady' has dense clouds of pink smoke that last from June until August and, like the species, is spectacular in fall.

Cotinus c. 'Golden Spirit' is an introduction remarkable for spring leaves that hold gold/chartreuse until midsummer. In fall, this cultivar, too, blazes red, orange, and yellow. There are so many places that can not accommodate a large tree because of powerlines, lack of space, or fear that large trees may be blown onto roofs that information about small trees is good news.

CABBAGES & KINGS

Those of you who have been horrified by mountaintops being blown away in Appalachia – and equally horrified that it can't be stopped – will welcome a new book, "Coal River" by Michael Shnayerson (Farrar, Straus and Giroux). The book's author attributes our inattention and massive unconcern to the fact that the people, who live where 1.5 million acres of hardwood forest have been destroyed and 700 miles of streams buried, are poor. Shnayerson concentrates on southern West Virginia and that area's most egregious coal company as well as the Army Corps of Engineers, the federal agency in charge of mining permits. The book has been widely praised for both its solid research and gripping narrative and found to be a tribute to the heroes whose stories it tells. It can be hoped that enough powerful people read it and take action before a particular impoundment of toxic waste gives way and wipes out the elementary school in its path.