INTRODUCTION

This small tree or shrub will usually grow several trunks from its base unless properly pruned (Fig. 1). It is native to California, Arizona and Utah, but grows predominantly in California foothills below 4000 feet. The temperature needs to drop below 28-degrees F. in order for flowering to be profuse. The plant is not grown in the eastern U.S.

GENERAL INFORMATION

Scientific name: Cercis occidentalis
Pronunciation: SER-sis ock-sih-den-TAY-liss
Common name(s): Western Redbud, California Redbud
Family: Leguminosae
USDA hardiness zones: 6 through 9 (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); specimen; sidewalk cutout (tree pit); residential street tree
Availability: grown in small quantities by a small number of nurseries

DESCRIPTION

Height: 15 to 25 feet
Spread: 15 to 25 feet
Crown uniformity: irregular outline or silhouette
Crown shape: vase shape
Crown density: moderate

Foliage

Leaf arrangement: alternate
Leaf type: simple
Leaf margin: entire
Leaf shape: cordate; ovate
Leaf venation: pinnate
Leaf type and persistence: deciduous
Leaf blade length: 2 to 4 inches
Leaf color: green
Fall color: yellow
Fall characteristic: not showy

Figure 1. Mature Western Redbud.
Flower

Flower color: lavender; pink
Flower characteristics: spring flowering; very showy

Fruit

Fruit shape: elongated
Fruit length: 1 to 3 inches
Fruit covering: dry or hard
Fruit color: brown
Fruit characteristics: attracts birds; no significant litter problem; 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: resistant
Current year twig color: brown
Current year twig thickness: medium

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: moderate
Aerosol salt tolerance: low

Other

Roots: surface roots are usually not a problem
Winter interest: no special winter interest
Outstanding tree: not particularly outstanding
Invasive potential: little, if any, potential at this time
Pest resistance: long-term health usually not affected by pests

Figure 2. Shaded area represents potential planting range.
USE AND MANAGEMENT

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 and Diseases

Probably similar to the pests affecting other Redbuds.