

## A Redbud for Small Spaces and a Smoketree for Fall Color

For small spaces such as a courtyard, corner bed, or near a walkway, or to be a highlight in a larger bed, consider the very ornamental 'Ruby Falls' Weeping Redbud. *Cercis canadensis* 'Ruby Falls' is a small, beautiful tree with heart-shaped leaves, pink flowers that appear in early spring before the leaves show, and interesting seed pods.



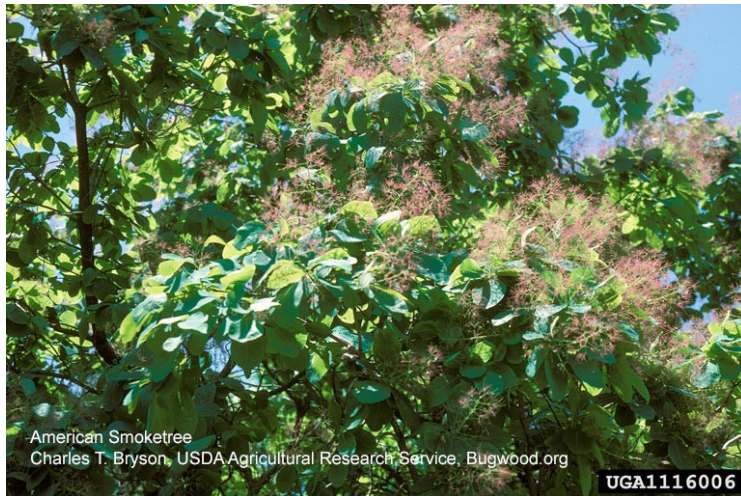
What makes this redbud stand out is the weeping habit of the branches. This means that the branches from the crown, or top of the tree, as well as other lateral branches grow downward in a “weeping” fashion—like a weeping willow. Deep purply-burgundy, pendulous leaves turn a bronzy-green in late summer. 'Ruby Falls' developed as a second-generation descendant from a controlled cross between two Redbud cultivars 'Covey', a green-leafed, weeping variety and 'Forest Pans', a non-weeping, purple-leafed variety – that was patented in 2010.

'Ruby Falls' grows only six to eight feet tall and spreads between five and six feet wide at full maturity. It takes a medium amount of water, especially when getting established of course, and is versatile enough to be planted in full sun, part sun, or part shade. The more sun, the more water will be needed, just like us! Redbuds do not transplant well, so plant a young tree in its perfect place so you can leave it undisturbed.

While 'Ruby Falls' is a deciduous tree, losing its leaves in winter, the rest of the year it is a pollinator and songbird magnet. It provides nectar for bees and birds will dine on the seeds. Deer also find it tasty, so be aware if you have deer marauding through your landscape. Insects such as granulate ambrosia beetles, black twig borers, treehoppers, caterpillars, scales, and leafhoppers will also enjoy devouring 'Ruby Falls' so keep your eyes peeled for these guys and take action if you see them.

Redbuds, 'Ruby Falls' included, are very susceptible to Botryosphaeria canker, a fungal disease that feeds on living tissue under the bark of twigs and branches, encircling the branch. The water supply to the leaves is cut off and the branch will suddenly wilt, then die. Drought-stressed Redbuds are most susceptible to this disease. Apply mulch out as far as the drip line of the limbs to keep the soil cooler and more evenly moist in the summer. Pruning out diseased branches when the stems and foliage are dry will

significantly help to reduce disease. Throw away the cuttings, do not compost them. Cut six to eight inches below any sunken, cracked, or diseased area. Be sure to disinfect your pruners between cuts with a spray of rubbing alcohol on the blades. Prune at proper angles as wounds are the entry points for this fungal disease. Sadly, there is no fungicide against *Botryosphaeria* canker. Please don't let this scare you off!!! Fortunately, 'Ruby Falls' and other Redbuds don't require much pruning and the preventive care is just good housekeeping.



Another colorful selection, consider a larger ornamental native tree with dark purple/burgundy leaves, *Cotinus obovatus* 'Royal Purple.' This American Smoketree cultivar can be trained as an upright tree form or pruned into a multi-trunked shrub. If left to its own devices, 'Royal Purple' can grow at least fifteen to twenty feet tall and up to fifteen feet wide, so be sure to give it plenty of space to attain its natural form. It is a slow grower,

so this is a landscape addition you might consider buying in a larger container to start than you might otherwise choose.

Want even *more* color from this magnificent specimen? Spring brings pink to purple panicles (loosely branched flower clusters) and in fall, the leaf color spans yellow, orange, and scarlet. In summertime, the blossoms fall leaving hair-like filaments that produce an attractive billowy plume giving a fluffy, hazy, or "smoky" appearance around the tree. The gnarled limb structure and dark, flaking bark provide interest in winter, when Smoketrees drop their leaves.

Native to rocky soils from Kentucky, Tennessee, and northern Alabama west to Oklahoma, there is a separate and distinct population of Smoketrees found in a few central Texas counties where the soil is also quite rocky. Smoketrees tolerate a wide range of soils; however, good drainage is essential. They have shallow, fibrous root systems and don't require much water after getting established, but cannot tolerate wet, poorly-drained soils.

Dry summer weather will promote a vibrant fall color. Mulching to the drip lines will help protect those shallow roots from hot soil temperatures in Texas. 'Royal Purple' Although Smoketrees like full sun for at least six hours daily, they can survive in partial sun or even partial shade. However, their gorgeous color tends to be more intense with more sun.

Once established, pruning in spring can help force colorful new growth. Native Smoketrees are drought tolerant and have no serious insect or disease problems

although they can be susceptible to leaf spot, rust, or verticillium wilt. They also may suffer from some dieback in very cold winters.

Not only are Smoketrees attractive to every person who sees them, songbirds enjoy them as well. To add texture as well as color to your landscape, pair 'Royal Purple' with finer textures such as perennial grasses and/or evergreen shrubs such as the Kaleidoscope Abelias. Uses in the garden include as a striking single specimen or group plantings as a "smoke"screen or as a border for a lawn or property edge. There are green varieties of Smoketree also and, if you are looking for more landscape interest, check out *C. coggygria* 'Golden Spirit' Smoketree. It emerges bright gold, changing to lime green in summer, then to shades of orange and red in fall.

*NC State Extension*, North Carolina Extension Gardener Plant Toolbox  
"*Cercis canadensis* 'Ruby Falls'" <https://plants.ces.ncsu.edu/plants/cercis-canadensis-ruby-falls/>

*Oregon State University* Landscape Plants - "*Cercis canadensis* 'Ruby Falls'"  
<https://landscapeplants.oregonstate.edu/plants/cercis-canadensis-ruby-falls>

*Clemson Cooperative Extension* Home & Garden Information Center - "Redbud"  
<https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/redbud/>

*The Morton Arboretum* Trees & Plants - "Eurasian smoke tree"  
<https://www.mortonarb.org/trees-plants/tree-plant-descriptions/eurasian-smoke-tree#destination>

*Texas A&M AgriLife* "AgriLife Water University's Top 100 Plants for North Texas"  
<https://cdn-ext.agnet.tamu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/top-100-plants-for-north-texas.pdf>

*Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center* Plant Database - "*Cotinus obovatus*"  
[https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id\\_plant=coob2](https://www.wildflower.org/plants/result.php?id_plant=coob2)

*The National Gardening Association* Plants Database - "Smoketrees: Plant Care and Collections of Varieties" <https://garden.org/plants/group/smoketrees/>