

I Want A Tree Just Like That

AGRI-VIEWS

by Chuck Otte, Geary County Extension Agent

This has been a good spring for ornamental flowering trees. Subsequently I have been getting a lot of phone calls, emails, texts, or Facebook posts, that go something like this. "Have you seen the tree that's blooming at -insert address here-? I want a tree just like that. What is it?"

Most of what has been blooming, at times spectacularly, this spring can be narrowed down to about three species: ornamental pear, flowering crabapple (hereafter referred to as flowering crab), and redbud. These three species have been putting on a spectacular show so it is understandable that people may want one of these trees in their yard.

Eastern Redbud is a native tree. It is found on hillsides and on the edge of riparian timber. It does well in partial shade but we often place it in landscapes where it is exposed to a lot of heat and dry southwest winds in summer. I don't know who named it redbud as the flowers are not so much red as they are varying shades of lavender. There are also white flowered versions which are appropriately often referred to as a whitebud or a white redbud. It's a small tree, rarely getting twenty feet tall. The fruit or seed of a redbud tree is a flat bean shaped pod that tends to stay on the tree through most of the winter. I've always liked the sound of the wind blowing through these seed pods.

Redbuds tend to have all their leaves out at the ends of the branches in a somewhat thin layer. The tree will also self prune lower branches when they become heavily shaded. It requires pruning every few years to keep these dead branches cleaned out of the tree. Redbuds are also somewhat short lived often starting to go downhill after about 25 to 30 years.

Ornamental pears are the pyramidal shaped trees that are the first ones to bloom in the spring with that solid display of bright white flowers. While spectacular, these trees are fraught with problems. They tend to bear lots of hard little fruits that drop out of the tree late in the season making a mess on sidewalks and driveways. The branches, because they often come off the main trunk at sharp angles, are prone to breaking in wind and ice storms. I discourage planting the ornamental, or Bradford, pears.

By far the best choice for a spring flowering tree, in my opinion, is the flowering crab. Flowering crabs have the advantage of having many different sizes and forms (shapes). You can choose from white to pink to almost red flowers. Most flowering crabs will have small fruit, a few are fruitless, so again, plant them where they will not drop these fruits on sidewalks, driveways or patios. Flowering crabs are a good choice for spring color and to attract birds in to your yard in the fall and winter. Unlike the ornamental pears, flowering crabs seem to be longer lived and have better branch attachment making them less susceptible to ice and wind damage.

Flowering crabs, like all apple trees, can have some leaf diseases that will cause them to defoliate during the winter. Fortunately, we have several newer cultivars that have good leaf disease resistance. We have a very good bulletin on flowering crabapples. It goes into great detail about size, form, flower color, fruit color and retention as well as leaf disease resistance. This can be very helpful if you are looking for a tree with specific bloom color that will fit in your yard. You can pick up a copy of the bulletin at the Extension Office, 119 East 9th Street. It is also available online at <http://tinyurl.com/lewbu7r>