



L to r, Ceris Pink Pom Poms tree and close-up. Right, Cercis Whitewater

IS REDBUD THE NEXT CRAPE MYRTLE?

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There are certainly many shared similarities between crape myrtle and redbud as it relates to the available genetic diversity that can be exploited in a breeding program, and the subsequent combinations of attributes and characters that can be combined in new cultivars.

For example, as regards leaf color variation, in crape myrtle there is of course green, purple more recently, and a gold leaf variant just described in China about 2 years ago. Similarly, green, gold, and purple are now found in redbuds.

Flower color diversity in crape myrtle is remarkable. But redbud is competitive in that arena also, with white, pink blush, purple, pink, reddish/purple, and magenta.

Although there is a compact form of redbud in commerce ('Ace of Hearts'), the dwarf forms of crape myrtle are much more diminutive as compared to standard types, so crape myrtle dwarf forms are much more dramatic and distinct than are redbud compact forms.



Cercis canadensis 'Rising Sun,' Cercis 'Merlot' (tree and leaves) and Cercis 'Ruby Falls' (tree and leaves)

The major reasons that redbud will not be the next crape myrtle, if we use overall popularity and tree numbers sold as the criteria are:

1. Redbud is a spring flowering species, has a limited flowering time of about 2 weeks, and competes with scores of other spring flowering plants for market share. Crape myrtle, by virtue of its extended flowering in summer, has a unique niche with fewer flowering-tree competitors.
2. Redbud is typically a relatively short-lived tree, perhaps 20-30 years at best. Crape myrtle much longer in most cases.
3. Crape myrtle is much more broadly adaptable to various soil conditions and landscape settings. It can be grown successfully in less than ideal landscape settings (the strip between a sidewalk and highway) that rebuds often perform poorly in.
4. Redbuds do not tolerate winter injury, weed/turf competition, physical injury (weed eaters, lawn mowers) as well as crape myrtle. Although rebuds are more cold hardy, winter injury recovery is poor if a tree is damaged.
5. And lastly, the term "crape murder" has much more flair than "cercis murder"!!!!

Redbud has a few advantages, but they are for the most part minor.

1. The primary species marketed in the U.S., *Cercis canadensis* is native. Certainly very important to many people.
2. The flowers are edible.
3. Redbud is an important species as a nectar source for our early spring pollinators (butterflies, bumblebees, blueberry bees, carpenter bees, and other early pollinator species).



Whether in the wild or in the garden, *Cercis Applachia Red* is a winner!

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