

Dig This by Peg Tillery (for 9-29-04) Cranberries and Redbud Trees, ©2005

We've received a run of dying Cercis (Redbud trees) in the Extension Office the last few weeks. The fifteen to twenty year old trees were growing in different parts of the County. Each trunk had a dark center showing signs of rot. One of the trees died of root strangulation with roots growing around in a circle. The other trees seemed to die for no reason. All gardeners followed proper planting and watering practices. There was no abuse of fertilizer and no pesticides or herbicides to cause problems for the trees.

My quest for an answer began with WSU information where I found nothing unusual. But then I used my favorite search engine "Google" and discovered information at both Clemson (South Carolina Extension) and Ohio State Extension. Both sites stated, "Redbuds particularly *Cercis canadensis*" live only about 20 years at the most. I also discovered the trees like hot sunny weather don't grow well north of California. Sometimes they'll thrive in Oregon but in Washington State *Cercis canadensis* is a short-lived tree. The word *canadensis* is deceiving because the trees rarely grow in Canada and when they do they are short lived there too.

Just to make sure the information I found was reputable, I talked with Poulsbo Tree Board member Ernie Linger who confirmed the diagnosis. Ernie said, "Arthur Lee Jacobsen [renowned tree expert] recommends European Redbud (commonly called Judas Tree)." The European Redbud is *Cercis siliquastrum* thriving in the Mediterranean. Look for it at your favorite local nursery if you're really craving a redbud for your garden. Avoid *Cercis Canadensis* (Eastern Redbud) and *Cercis occidentalis* (California Redbud or Western Redbud).

On a more cheery plant note Deb Fenwick one of the mainstays at the IslandWood Classroom Garden recently took me on a tour of this incredible outdoor classroom and greenhouse where third to fifth grade students from King and Kitsap County come to learn about growing vegetables, fruit and herbs. Blueberries border the fence in several areas and the ground under the blueberry bushes is festooned with a tantalizing carpet of cranberry plants. I have lingonberries for a ground cover in one area of my garden and the cranberries at IslandWood have sorely tempted me. I'm now on a quest to find some for planting. I've located cranberries in the Raintree Nursery catalogue and online. I haven't had time to contact our local nurseries but I'll try to locate cranberry plants there first. If you can't locate cranberry plants nearby Raintree is in Morton. The website is www.raintreenursery.com and phone number is (360) 496-6400.

Deb chose "Shaw's Success" to plant at IslandWood. Raintree listed "Shaw's" in the 2001 catalogue but on their current website they list "Stevens." Call around to our local nurseries to see if they have either "Shaw's" or "Stevens." Either variety would grow very well here in Kitsap County. Deb thoroughly researched the cranberry plant before choosing and planting. We always think of cranberries growing in soggy bogs. Deb discovered the reason they're grown that way is ease of harvesting commercially. The growers flood the beds and then harvest the berries. Machinery easily combs the berries

out of the man-made bogs. In our gardens we can grow these plants as a ground cover providing plenty of water in the same growing conditions as blueberries. Blueberries and cranberries make a perfect plant marriage.

Deb recommends “The Wild Berry Book, Romance, Recipes and Remedies,” by Katie Letcher Lyle, published in 1994 by Northwoods Press, ISBN 155971221X. Page 60 says “The Indians enjoyed drinking cranberry juice and cranberry tea, and eating cranberry bread. They showed colonists how to make cranberry sauce or jam (sweetened with maple sugar) to accompany venison.” Deb loved the description to “boil for ten minutes (until the popping stops).” The book says the name “cranberry came from “crane-berry” because the flower drooped and bobbed like a crane’s head.”

I personally loved the whorls of tiny leaves decorating the plants at IslandWood. “Shaw’s Success” has multi-shade-green leaves. Deb said the plants produce “great white flowers in the spring.” The berries were fruiting last week and I couldn’t resist popping some in my mouth. The tartness was delicious, who needed to wait for Thanksgiving? Deb said their berries thrive on [benign] neglect. Cranberries are *Vaccinium macrocarpon*. They are heavy producers and love our acid soil. Leaves are tinged red and plants are self-fertile.

Lingonberries are a Scandinavian favorite. They have evergreen foliage and bright red berries (shaped like blueberries). They’re easy to grow and cover the ground appealingly. Flowers are white. I hope you’ll try your luck with blueberries, cranberries and lingonberries in your gardens. Even if you let the birds harvest the berries these delightful and hardy plants offer tremendous appeal in the landscape.