

Front Lines

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Cercis Wins Chelsea

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Fact: When folks ask me what my favorite tree is, for the last 30 years I've said *Cercis canadensis* without missing a beat. The leaf shape, the flower structure and placement, the reliable joyous pop of spring color—I just love it. And it appears the powers that be at this year's Chelsea Flower Show agree.

That's because they chose Flame Thrower Cercis as the Plant of the Year at the 2021 showing. Introduced by Star Roses and Plants (and sold as Eternal Flame in the U.K. and Europe, by the way), Flame Thrower was given the top prize as the most exciting, innovative and diverse new plant for 2021.

This selection came out of the research of Dr. Denny Werner at the JC Raulston Arboretum. Denny is also the JC Raulston Distinguished Professor of Horticultural Science and plant breeder at North Carolina State University. They connected with Star Roses and Plants to introduce this very cool new variety of red bud in 2019.

What makes Flame Thrower so great? Foliage colors that are intense and head-turning throughout the seasons. It has intense hues of reds and oranges in spring and yellows and greens in summer. Apparently, this is a color breakthrough in cercis. And, of course, Flame Thrower does have those adorable clusters of pink blossoms in early spring. It tops off at 15- to 20-ft. tall and does best in Zones 5 to 9.

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