

12—Seeding dreams: Redbud trees

When we first moved to our house here in southeastern Pennsylvania, I planted a redbud tree near the driveway. That way, I could see the tree every time I drove in or out. What I didn't anticipate is that we would eventually have dozens of these lovely little trees everywhere around the property.

Native to the eastern U.S., the eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) is a tree that isn't particularly fussy about where it grows—it thrives whether it's in sun or shade, loam, or clay—or how much water it gets. It only grows to about twenty feet or so, making it perfect for small yards or naturalized borders. All that would be enough, but redbuds are spectacular in early spring when clusters of rose-purple flowers bloom profusely on bare branches. It's like having a corps de ballet in pink tutus positioned all around the yard.

What's surprising is that I only ever planted that one tree. For the others, I credit squirrels, birds, and deer that must have dropped partially eaten seed pods at random.

Every spring, I pull out dozens of new seedlings that crop up in the flower beds. I know that these are only a small fraction of what there would be if every seed took root. Like any plant that produces seeds, a redbud makes way more than will ever grow, because only a small percentage of them will germinate, take root, and survive to maturity. Some seeds will be eaten by wildlife. Some won't get enough water. Some will simply be "outcompeted" and won't get enough sunlight or nutrients. If a tree relied on just one seed to replicate itself, we'd never have a sustainable forest.

I look at the redbuds and remember nature walks in springtime with my dad; how many times he'd pick up a maple key (a.k.a., samara) and say, "Look how prolific nature is! One tree makes all these seeds so that at least a few will survive to become new trees." Because a tree can't plant and tend its own seeds, it relies on numbers and some good fortune to get the job done.

An idea that's been popularized over the last ten years or so is that you should figure out what your passion is and then devote yourself to that one thing, not letting anything stand in your way. It's certainly important to devote yourself to a goal, but, as the redbud demonstrates, I think there's also wisdom in not putting all your eggs in one basket.

I find myself wondering . . .

Things don't always work out, no matter how much we want them to or how much effort we put into them. Besides that, who says we can't have more than one dream?

Reflection:

Do you find it challenging to settle on just the One Thing to do with your life?

List all the things that call to you, large and small.

Consider your list: are there compatible goals, ones that you could combine into one career?

How can you nourish all of these?