



THE FLOWERING DOGWOOD

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Among the early spring-flowering trees, the dogwood, *Cornus florida*, is regarded by most North Carolinians as unrivaled in attractiveness either in its natural woodland habitat or in cultivated landscape gardens. This small ornamental tree offers landscape interest for all seasons, beginning with its floral display in spring and followed by pleasant green foliage (casting a light shade) in summer. Fall in North Carolina is enhanced by the brilliant show of red, orange and scarlet foliage along with the bright red fruit borne in small clusters. In winter, button shaped buds are prominent on the tips of the twigs. The interesting bark texture and branches help create an excellent winter silhouette.

Landscape Use – Dogwoods have a variety of landscape uses. With the year-round interest, dogwoods are excellent for specimen or accent plantings around the terrace or patio. Often a combination of rhododendrons, azaleas and dogwoods planted in a raised bed creates an interesting natural landscape feature. Dogwoods make excellent understory trees in a semi-shaded area and are also now being used in conjunction with typical foundation plantings and groundcovers in large beds around a building.

Culture – Dogwoods are easily grown in lawn and garden areas all across the state, adapting themselves to various exposures and soil types. Generally growing to a height

of 20 to 30 feet with a low, broad head and tiers of horizontal branches, the dogwood is considered a “well-behaved” tree — and requires very little maintenance.

When planting dogwoods be certain to provide good drainage. The most favorable soil is moist, fertile loam slightly acid to neutral (pH 5.5 to 6). The addition of peat or leaf-mold improves nearly all soils for the dogwood. A 3- to 4-inch layer of organic mulch, replenished occasionally, is beneficial as it keeps soil moist near the surface where the roots are most active, discourages weeds from growing, and most of all, offers protection to the trunk from mowers and other equipment. The optimum transplanting time is fall and winter. It is helpful to root-prune dogwood a season before transplanting. However, trees grown in containers are transplanted throughout the year. Nursery-grown trees that have been root-pruned and grown in full sunlight are far superior to those transplanted from the woods. In most cases, their cost is well justified by quicker recovery after transplanting and better shaped branches.

After planting, and during the first few years of establishment, the most important cultural aspect is to provide ample water during dry stressful periods. Dogwoods are also susceptible to a very serious insect pest which can lead to general decline of the tree. The dogwoodborer larvae is mainly a problem to trees which

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have been physically injured (lawnmowers or weedeaters too close to trunk) as the larvae need an injured area in order to penetrate the bark. Dogwood anthracnose, *Discula*, has weakened and killed many native trees. There are several fungicides which are recommended for this problem. It is a good idea to plant trees in areas in somewhat open areas that get good air circulation. Remember to mulch well around base of tree, brace newly planted trees to prevent wind damage, and wrap the trunks of newly transplanted trees with burlap or tree wrap paper the first winter after transplanting.

Selected Cultivars

- 'Cherokee Chief' (red bracts)
- 'Cherokee Princess' (white)
- 'Cloud 9' (white)
- 'Pendula' (white, weeping form)
- 'Plena' (double white form)
- 'Red Cloud' (pink bracts)
- 'White Cloud' (white)

Cornus kousa – Kousa Dogwood

The kousa dogwood is also a popular, small ornamental tree with numerous landscape uses. This species blooms about 2 weeks later than *Cornus florida*, with 4 bracts that are tapered at the ends. The blooms typically last 5 to 6 weeks. As the tree ages, the bark develops a multicolored tan-gray appearance. The fruit is somewhat different than *C. florida*, being approximately 1 inch in diameter on a single, drooping stalk, borne in late summer and early fall. An interesting characteristic about the Kousa dogwood is that the blooms appear after the foliage comes out in the spring.

Selected Cultivars

- 'Milky Way'
- 'Summer Stars'
- 'Aurora'
- 'Celestial'
- 'Stellar Pink'
- 'Ruth Ellen'

Other dogwood species of interest:

- Cornus alba – Tatarian (Redtwig) Dogwood
- Cornus mas – Corneliancherry Dogwood
- Cornus controversa – Giant Dogwood
- Cornus sericea – Redosier Dogwood