

DOGWOOD TREES

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Dogwood trees (*Cornus* varieties) are a group of deciduous trees grown mainly as small landscape specimens valued for their beautiful spring show of flowers. *Cornus florida* and *Cornus kousa* are the two primarily grown species, although a few others are also grown including a Pacific Northwest native, *Cornus nuttallii*. Many varieties of florida and kousa are available, with colors ranging from white, to pink, to even reddish. A nice and very popular small tree.

Latin name: *Cornus*

Type: Deciduous trees

Exposure: Part shade-protect from heat!

Growth Rate: Moderate

Hardiness: Zones 5-8 (-20°F)

Size: 20'-25' tall and 15'-20' wide

Soil: Well-drained, rich soil.

Growth Habit: Shrubby, broadly conical

What are the differences in the types?

Cornus florida 'Rubra' is the standard pink flowering dogwood that you see everywhere. *Cornus florida* is native to the Eastern U.S. and has numerous cultivars available. It will flower *before* the leaves come out in spring. Unfortunately, *Cornus florida* is also more disease prone and more temperamental than *Cornus kousa*. *Cornus Kousa* is a native of Korea and Japan, and will bloom after the leaves have started to emerge. It will often tend to be a bit shrubbier than *C. florida*, i.e. not as graceful of a tree. There are not nearly as many cultivars of *C. kousa* because it is quite a bit newer to American gardens than the native *C. florida*. *Cornus kousa* has proven to be more reliable than most other types of Dogwood, and is becoming more popular as the number of available varieties increases. Other species, like *Cornus nuttallii*, *controversa*, *mas*, and *alternifolia* are also grown, but to a much lesser extent.

What kind of blooms can I expect?

Dogwood flowers are not really true flowers! The reason Dogwood blooms last so long is that the colored portion that you see is not a flower petal, but a bract (a modified leaf)! The true flower is very small and uninteresting, you can see them right between the colored bracts. The flowers of the different species will always be white. Pink flowers occur on some cultivars, such as *Cornus florida* 'Rubra'. Shades of pink dogwoods can run anywhere from a faint pink, to a salmon pink, to almost red in some cases. Your best option is to pick out a tree in bloom in order to make sure that you get the color you really want. Named varieties will have a consistent color, and are safe bets if you know the color you want, and have seen the same cultivar blooming before. Generic varieties, specifically *Cornus florida* 'Rubra', will vary quite a bit depending on the grower, seed origin, and many other factors. In this case, you won't be able to know the exact shade of pink unless you actually see it or a plant from its same group in bloom.

What kind of conditions do I need to provide?

Dogwoods NEED WELL DRAINED SOIL. Root rot has killed more Dogwood trees than just about anything else; they really do not like to be waterlogged. Site them out of areas that will receive excess water, such as in a lawn where sprinklers will constantly hit them. If possible, planting on a mound will give best results. Also, Dogwoods can burn if they get too hot. Avoid hot afternoon sun and reflected heat.

When and how should I fertilize/prune?

Dogwoods need minimal pruning, especially as they age. When they are younger, minor pruning to shape them may be necessary, but they tend to be alright on their own. They may need to be limbed up as they age, as they tend to be fairly low-branched. Fertilize in spring with a high phosphorous fertilizer, and avoid high applications of nitrogen, as this will lead to weak growth which is easy prey for fungal diseases that may be lurking nearby.

What problems may I encounter?

Most Dogwood problems are related to moisture. Root rot will weaken and kill your tree, but planting in the proper site can prevent this. Fungal diseases, such as leaf spot are a common problem, but can be lessened with a winter dormant spray application. Anthracnose can be devastating, but is not as common as it is made out to be. Leaf and bark scorch can disfigure a tree, so avoid areas that are too hot or reflect heat onto your plants. Proper planting and maintenance will prevent mostly any possible problems, but many people are unaware of the proper conditions for dogwoods, or are unaware of the potential hazards that dogwoods can face here. The best thing you can do for your dogwood is to become informed about the different types, their preferences, and then make a thoughtful decision as to where you should plant your new tree where it can flourish and bring you years of spring beauty.

DOGWOOD VARIETIES

Cornus florida- Eastern Flowering Dogwood-20 to 30' tall and wide, rounded to flat form. Mid-spring flowers.

C. florida- white flowers followed by red fruit.

-'**Cherokee Brave**'- Deep reddish-pink flowers with a white center. A vigorous grower.

-'**Cherokee Chief**'- Deep ruby-red flowers, paler at the base. Reddish new growth.

-'**Cherokee Daybreak**'- White flowers, green leaves with white margins. Pink to deep red fall color. Upright in habit.

-'**Cherokee Sunset**'- Red-pink flowers, green leaves with yellow margins. Pink-red-purple fall color. Pink-tipped new growth.

-'**Rubra**' – A generic term for the pink flowering dogwood. This is THE pink flowering dogwood most people think of, but beware, because they are highly variable!

Cornus kousa- 20' tall and wide, spreading, dense. Late spring flowers.

C. kousa- white flowers followed by red fruit

-var. **chinensis** - White flowers, which are larger than the species

-var. **chinensis 'Milky Way'**- White flowers, heavier blooming than species

-'**Heart Throb**' – Large deep red flowers, some to 4" across!

-'**Satomi**' ('**Rosabella**')- Rose-red flowers, red-purple fall color.

-'**Weaver's Weeping**'- White flowering, weeping form. 6'-12' tall.

Cornus florida x kousa (x rutgersensis)-

These trees deserve a little bit of introduction. *Cornus florida* and *kousa* have been planted for quite a long time. It has been a matter of one or the other, sometimes one was even grafted onto the other, but the fact remained that they both had their quirks. So, someone finally crossed the two and came up with a few intermediate varieties which were superior to either parent (At Rutgers University, hence the name). If you are leery of dogwoods, these might just change your mind.

-'**Aurora**' ('**Rutban**' **PP7205**) – 'Aurora' is a white Rutgers' hybrid, blooming somewhere between *Cornus florida* and *kousa*. The flowers last for quite a while and are usually produced very heavily. A bit smaller than 'Stellar Pink', 'Aurora' ends up somewhere between 20'-25' tall and wide.

-'**Celestial**' ('**Rutdan**', '**Galaxy**' **PP7204**) – Another white form, 'Celestial' is very vigorous, and more upright in habit than other types. Instead of the expected vase-shape, 'Celestial' tends to have a uniform width all along its height. A bit smaller than other varieties, it is usually only 15-20' tall x 15'+ wide after a few decades.

-'**Stellar Pink**' ('**Rutgan**' **PP7207**) – This is the pink form that we carry. It tends to be fairly upright in youth, and forgoes the standard vase shape for a more uniform width all the way up. The flowers appear after *Cornus florida*, but before *Cornus kousa*, and are a soft pink. 20'-30' tall and wide over time.

Cornus mas 'Golden Glory'- **Golden Glory Cornelian Cherry**

This is the odd one out in our dogwood tree section. It ends up being a multi-stemmed shrub or small tree. The flowers will appear in late winter, and are small, yellow, and heavily clustered. Bright red cherry-like fruit will follow in midsummer, *and they are edible*. 20'-25' tall x 15'-20' wide. A real interest!

Cornus nuttallii – **Pacific Dogwood**

Cornus nuttallii is our native western dogwood, and a truly incredible tree when it is happy and growing well. You can see the huge white "flowers" lighting up the woods in late spring, and that is usually enough to make someone want one of their own. Its major drawback is that as it is an inhabitant of the woods, it does not often fare well in landscape situations. It is wonderful in a semi-shaded area with good drainage if you can provide it, but other areas will often lead to failure. It tends to be moisture sensitive, and will suffer from excesses, though it still needs ample moisture to survive. Also, the bark is very fair in complexion, and so will often scorch in the heat, especially if there is no shade nearby. That said, if you have a suitable spot, it is an excellent tree, usually topping out at 40' tall x 25' wide in the wild, but probably considerably smaller under any landscape conditions.

Cornus x 'Eddie's White Wonder' (**Cornus nuttallii x florida**)

This hybrid is a west coast/east coast cross that basically creates a hardier, heavier flowering Pacific Dogwood. Not to say that it is foolproof, but it isn't as touchy as our native variety, and is better able to withstand common landscape conditions. Generally about 20' tall x 15' wide.