

# Flowering Dogwood

## *Cornus florida*

### Alternate Names

American dogwood, Virginia Dogwood, arrowwood, American boxwood, white dogwood, white cornel, Florida dogwood, cornelian tree, dogwood, eastern flowering dogwood.



No. 1 *C. florida*, Flowers, FE

### Description

The Flowering dogwood is a common flowering tree or shrub found globally. It is part of the Cornaceae family, and can grow from 5 to 15 m (15 to 40 ft) depending on sun exposure. Opposite-leaved and simple, they can grow to 7 to 12 cm (3 to 5 in), are teardrop shaped, with a medium green hue during warmer months and red and purple during autumn. As the tree matures the bark forms an alligator-like pattern as it is broken into small blocks, which helps distinguish the dogwood from other species. The flowers of the dogwood range in shades from white and pink, and bloom between March to June. Each flower grows to about 5 to 10 cm wide, and has 4 large bracts, with branches that grow horizontally and alternate (Image No. 1). This tree produces flowers, making this species an angiosperm. Native to the eastern United States, the Flowering dogwood has a large range of distribution. The species ranges from Maine, to the south of Florida, west to Texas, to southern Michigan (Image No. 4). The tree is an understory species, but is also found on floodplains, slopes, swamps, and ravines. The dogwood can tolerate full-sun, but prefers partial to broken shade.

There are more than 100 various cultivars with different characteristics (color, size, timing). Poisonous to humans, the fruits appear bright red in drupes, and ripen in



No. 2 *C. florida*, Fruit, FE

Autumn when matured to six years (Image No. 2). Seed dissemination is mostly due to birds and mammals, while they typically germinate in the spring after they fall. This species is tolerant of higher temperatures, but is limited to dry environments. The dogwood has thin bark, making it easy prey to pests and hazards.

### Cultural Importance and Usage

The root bark of the dogwood was used as a fever reducer, antidiarrheal, pain reliever, and skin product by Native Americans. It was also used as a possible counteract to some poisons,

remedy for aches, and used in an infusion for diseases like worms and measles. The bark was made into chewing sticks, and also used to whiten teeth. The flowers were used to treat fevers and colic pains. Multiple parts of the dogwood were used as a compound to treat blood diseases like malaria, and used as blood purifiers. Along as a medicinal use, Native Americans used the roots to extract red dye. The dye was used to color quills and eagle feathers.

Originating in Appalachia, many legends refer and identify the American dogwood. In several Native American tribes, the dogwood was symbolized and believed to be a ceremonial tree. The dogwood was believed to be a symbol of good luck to the Quileute and Makah communities. The Cherokee believed in anthropomorphic spirits, similar to Celtic pixies, known as the Little People. *Yunwi Tsunsdi*, described as small men and women were gentle and friendly creatures, but sometimes they were mischievous if misplaced or bothered. These cultures considered them as protectors, and could hear them at night drumming or talking in the woods close to home. There were the Rock People, the Laurel People, and the Dogwood People. The Rock People were remembered as vengeful malevolent, and the Laurel People were spirited and amusing, while the Dogwood People were known as the creatures of kindness and benevolence.



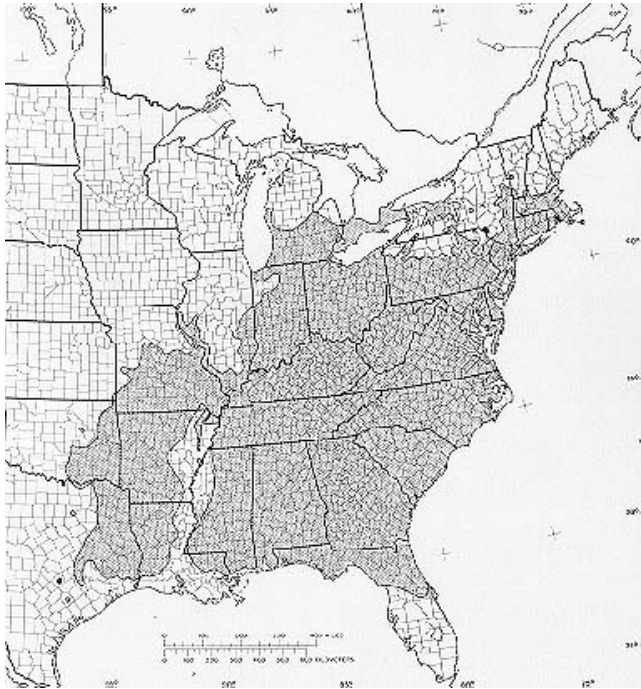
No. 3 C. florida, in Spring, FE

During the Civil War, the dogwood was used as a source to create tools, pulleys, wheel cogs, and many sturdy objects due to the strong timber. It was also used as medicine during the war for quinine.

The flowering dogwood tree is contemporarily significant to the United States. It is the state tree of Missouri and Virginia and the state flower of North Carolina and Virginia. They are also used in horticulture.

### **Significance**

The environmental impact of the dogwood is valuable to wildlife. The seeds, fruit, flowers, twigs, bark, and leaves are useful to various species. The Flowering dogwood is a food source to many bird species and mammals. The tree consists of high amounts of calcium and fat from berries and leaves, but also provides shelter and habitat for many species. Bird species that consume seeds of the dogwood include game birds, songbirds, and forest edge species. Other species that consume the seeds include chipmunks, white-footed mice, foxes, squirrels, black bears, beavers, deer, and skunks. Species that consume the leaves and sprouts include rabbits, deer, and beaver. Although the fruit is poisonous to humans, it is commonly consumed by birds (grouse, bob-white quail, wild



No. 4 *C. florida*, Geographic Range, McLemore

coming from improper drainage. Some other pests to watch with dogwoods include cankers and mildew.

turkey, and more), chipmunks, foxes, skunks, rabbits, deer, beaver, bears, squirrels, and other mammals.

The Flowering dogwood is labeled of least concern in most areas, but in some states the species is more at risk due to some environmental pests. It is endangered in Maine, vulnerable in New York, and threatened in Vermont. This species is susceptible to larvae that will dig through bark and feed on the trunk. The Dogwood borer larvae cause harm to wounds of the tree, destroying the cambium which in turn kills the dogwood. The Flowering dogwood is also threatened by dogwood blight which is caused by the dogwood anthracnose fungus. Infection spreads into the tree causing death. Root injury is also another common lead to stress in dogwoods, as well as root rot

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