

Cornus species

The *Cornus* species, commonly known as flowering dogwood, is native to the eastern states of North America with a natural range extending from Florida and the Texas Panhandle to Maine and from extends westward through southern Ontario to central Michigan, central Illinois, Missouri, southeastern Kansas, eastern Oklahoma, and eastern Texas.

Cornus florida, the White Flowering Dogwood, is a multibranched shrub or small tree that commonly reaches 5 to 15m in height. It is characterised by a broad, rounded crown and large, simple, opposite leaves, 5 to 15cm in length and which give a vibrant Autumn display as they turn red to reddish-purple. The bark on mature trees develops an attractive alligator pattern and the minor branches and twigs have an attractive deep red to purple hue. The large attractive blooms, in this particular instance white, are borne in profusion and can last for up to three months in warm temperate climates and up to two months in the colder northern states of the US. Red drupe style berries are produced in the late Autumn and are very popular with a wide range of birdlife.

This species is an understory plant in the wild and can grow happily in part shade to full sun. In the wild it occurs on soils that vary from moist, deep soils to light-textured, well-drained soils, but it most commonly occurs on coarse to medium-textured acidic soils with a pH factor of 6 to 7.

Propagation

Dogwood is commonly grown from seed but can be characterized by delayed germination due to embryo dormancy. Under natural conditions, seeds overwinter before germination occurs, and some seeds do not germinate until the second Spring. Fresh seed (ie up to a few weeks old) germinates readily but patchy but germination rates can be improved by warm, moist stratification for 60 days followed by a long period (120 days) of cold temperatures. Scarification (nicking of the seed coat) can also promote higher germination rates.

Place seed in a plastic bag with moist sphagnum moss and seal. Maintain in a warm light position and keep the moss damp. Any seed that germinate during stratification should be potted up immediately. Seed that has not germinated should then be placed in a cool to cold spot, still in its sphagnum. Once germination occurs plant the seed in a forestry tube with a good potting mix kept moist but not damp. Grown on until the seedling is at least 10 cm in height and then plant out in a sunny well-drained position after the danger of frost has passed.