Growing Cornus (Dogwood)

Latin Name Pronunciation: kor’nuss

CULTURE: The Pagoda Dogwood (C. alternifolia) and Dogwoods with variegated leaves fare best in partial shade. Site Cornus canadensis in partial to full shade. For other Dogwoods, choose a site in full sun to part shade. Varieties grown for the color of their stems or autumn leaves will give their best performance in full sun. Grow Dogwoods in moderately rich, well-drained soil; they can take a soil that is evenly moist but not soggy. Seldom need fertilizing. Few insect or disease problems.

Space shrubs such as C. alternifolia, C. sanguinea, and C. sericea 3–5′ apart; they will become 5–9′ tall at maturity, depending on variety and pruning. Trees such as C. controversa, C. elliptica (aka C. angustata), C. florida, and C. kousa will grow from 10–30′ tall at maturity and should be spaced accordingly.

PRUNING: Stems of C. alba, C. sanguinea, and C. sericea provide the best color in full sun (and will resprout vigorously) when cut to within 12″ of the ground every 2 to 3 years. Prune in late January to very early March in Zones 4–7, earlier further south, before the sap begins to rise. Pruning of other shrubs and trees consists of removing any dead or weak growth and shaping as needed, in early spring.

GROWTH: Growth rates for C. florida and C. alternifolia varieties are slow when first planted, then moderate once established. C. kousa is slower growing. Other Dogwoods may grow 25″ or more a year if conditions are good.

SUGGESTED USE: Plant shrubs and trees behind perennials, in a shrub border, along a roadside or by a pond. C. canadensis is lovely as a ground cover or in a wild flower garden.