

Flowering dogwood

(*Cornus florida*)

For definitions of botanical terms, visit en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Glossary_of_botanical_terms.

When in bloom, Flowering dogwood is arguably one of Florida's most beautiful flowering trees. Though dormant in winter, the tree comes alive in early spring. Before leaves emerge, a bounty of showy white to pinkish blooms cover the crown. From late summer to fall, its abundant fruit provides food for a variety of birds and small mammals. Flowering dogwood occurs naturally along the edges of mesic hardwood forests and pinelands throughout North and much of Central Florida.



Photo by Emily Bell

On first sight, flowers appear to have four large white petals with greenish-yellow centers. In fact, those "petals" are bracts and the centers are a cluster of tiny flowers, each with minute greenish-yellow bracts. The large bracts are typically white but may be pinkish to almost red. They are broadly ovate with a distinctly notched apex. Flowers are born in clusters on the tips of each branch. Leaves are simple and ovate with entire margins and veins that curve toward the apex. Leaf arrangement is opposite. Fruits are large bright red drupes born in clusters of two to 10. The tree is multi-trunked and multi-branched with a spreading crown.

Historically, dogwood (*Cornus* spp.) has had many uses: American Civil War soldiers made a tea from the bark to treat pain and fever, and a poultice from the leaves to cover open wounds. Native Americans made a red dye from the roots and used the bark and roots to treat malaria. The dense wood has been used for many artisan items, including walking canes, arrows and wine presses.

Family: Cornaceae (Dogwood family)

Native range: Panhandle, peninsula south to Orange, Polk and Manatee counties (excluding most east coast counties)

To see where natural populations of Flowering dogwood have been vouchered, visit www.florida.plantatlas.usf.edu.

Lifespan: Perennial

Soil: Moderately moist to dry, well-drained acidic soils

Exposure: Full sun to partial shade

Growth habit: 20–30' tall, crown spreading to 15–20' wide

Propagation: Cuttings, seed

Florida regions of landscape suitability: North, Central

Garden tips: An ideal setting for Flowering dogwood is the understory of large oaks or other deciduous trees. In the right conditions, it is easy to grow and relatively maintenance free. However, it does not tolerate alkaline soils or prolonged exposure to intense heat. If planting in full sun, additional irrigation may be necessary.

Note: While Flowering dogwood can thrive in just the right conditions, it struggles with anything less. It is easily stressed in suboptimal environments making it susceptible to common fungal infections. Additionally, Florida is the southernmost edge of this species' range. These factors make it quite finicky for use in the landscape.

Flowering dogwood is available from nurseries that specialize in Florida native plants. Visit www.PlantRealFlorida.org to find a nursery in your area.

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