

# Flowering Dogwood

*Cornus florida*



TPWD PHOTO



The beautiful white bloom of the dogwood is one of the first signs of spring in East Texas forests. While pretty to look at, the flowering dogwood provides food for many Pineywoods animals.

*Northern Pineywoods*

# Flowering Dogwood

*Cornus florida*



## APPEARANCE

**Height:** 35 to 40 feet (10 to 12 m)

### Distinguishing Characteristics

- Oval or ovate leaves, about 3 to 6 inches (7.6 to 15.2 cm) long and 1 to 3 inches (2.5 to 7.6 cm) wide
- Shrub or small, low-branched tree usually with a flat-topped crown
- Creamy-white flowers with 4 petals each and blooms in early spring
- Most often found growing in forested, shady areas under other hardwoods and pines.
- *Deciduous* (loses its leaves in fall)

## LIFE HISTORY

**Range:** Eastern deciduous forests as far north as Maine, extending west to eastern Texas and Missouri

**Flowers:** Early spring

**Fruit:** Red fruits develop in fall. Mammals, from squirrels to deer, and at least 28 bird species, eat the fruit.

**Seeds:** Dispersed through animal droppings; germinate the following spring

**Life span:** Up to about 80 years

## HABITAT

Flowering dogwood grows best in moist soils, but will grow in drier habitats. They like to grow in the shade of larger trees as understory plants.

## FLOWERING DOGWOODS AND THE ENVIRONMENT

Flowering dogwood is seriously threatened by a powerful fungus, *Discula destructiva*, or dogwood anthracnose. This fungus is spreading rapidly throughout the range of dogwood. The disease, whose origin is unknown, kills trees within two to three years of initial infection. Trees in moist sites on lower slopes and bottomlands are most susceptible. Some scientists feel that the blight is so widespread that they hold little hope of saving flowering dogwood in the wild.

## FLOWERING DOGWOODS AND PEOPLE

The common name, dogwood, comes from England. Years ago, people there used the bark of the bloodtwig dogwood (*Cornus sanguinea*) to bathe mangy dogs. On this continent, flowering dogwood has been used by Native Americans to make scarlet dyes and tinctures.

Although the fruits are poisonous to humans, in the late 1700s, colonists made a tea from dogwood bark to reduce fevers and soothe colds. The wood of the dogwood tree is used today to make small tools and ornaments. It has been under cultivation in North America since the 1730s.

Today, flowering dogwoods are popular landscaping trees. They are slow growing (often only a few centimeters per year in dense shade), resilient, and beautiful as an accent plant.