

Cornus florida

[Synonyms : *Benthamidia florida*, *Cornus candidissima*, *Cynoxylon floridum*]

FLOWERING DOGWOOD is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to eastern and central North America it has petal-like, white or pink leaves (bracts) and leaves that turn orange or scarlet in Autumn.

It is also known as American boxwood, American dogwood, American cornelian tree, *Amerikanischer Blumen-Hartriegel* (German), Arrowwood, Bitter redberry, Box tree, Boxwood, Budwood, Bunchberry, Common dogwood, Common white dogwood, Cornel, Cornelian tree, Cornel tree, *Cornouiller a fleurs* (French), Dogtree, Dogwood, Dogwood of America, Eastern dogwood, Eastern flowering dogwood, False box, False boxwood, Florida cornel, Florida dogwood, Flowering cornel, Great-flowered dogwood, Green ozier, Indian arrow wood, Male Virginian dogwood, Nature's mistake, New England boxwood, Virginia dogwood, White cornel, White dogwood, and White flowering dogwood; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of durability, and duration.

Florida means 'flowering abundantly'.

Some authorities suggest that the name Dogwood was actually developed from an English word 'dagwood' (itself derived from 'dagger-wood') as apparently butchers used to choose the wood for making daggers or skewers.

In addition to skewers, this hard wood has also been used to make agricultural implements and small tools such as wedges. (The North American Cherokee tribe not only chose this wood for carving but also used it to make shuttles for their looms.)

For the North American Indians the plant was a clock. Its regular flowering period signalled the beginning of corn-planting (*Zea*). The Creoles used twigs, stripped of bark, to clean and whiten their teeth (and authorities have noted that the juice in the twigs will have preserved and hardened the gums at the same time).

As a source of medicine flowering dogwood was appreciated by several North American Indian tribes. The Cherokee and Rappahannock Indians used it to treat diarrhoea – and they and the Iroquois also relied upon it as a remedy for some blood disorders. It was used in the treatment of fever, headaches, some female problems wind, childhood diseases eg. measles, worms, and it was applied to wounds by the Cherokee Indians. The latter also used it in remedies for vocal problems (including hoarseness). The Houma tribe turned to it for treating malaria, and like the Cherokee, they also prescribed it for fever generally. Apart from the foregoing it seems also to have been valued as a tonic by the Delaware, Rappahannock and Cherokee Indians.

This root bark is the source of a scarlet pigment and, if the bark is combined with iron sulphate, a black ink can also be made.

A bitter but pleasant-tasting drink can be prepared from an infusion of the fruit. These berries have also been used as a substitute for olives (*Olea europaea*).

In the United States this is the state shrub or tree for Missouri (adopted in 1955), and Virginia (adopted in 1956). It had already become the state flower for Virginia in 1918 and in 1941 North Carolina chose it as a flower emblem as well.

Apparently in North America the fruit are a particular delicacy of the robin (which, unlike the European bird of the same name, is actually a large thrush). Flocks of these birds fly south for the Winter and will strip the fruit from shrubs or trees lying in their path. The strong brown wood has long been used for making small items such as shuttles and pulleys, tool handles, skewers and golf club heads – and it has also been made into charcoal for gunpowder. At the turn of the 20th and 21st Centuries it is used commercially for turning and, still, for making small implements. The flowering dogwood was introduced to England in about 1740. Medicinally, the root bark has been used by herbalists for the treatment of intermittent fevers (sometimes as a quinine, *Cinchona officinalis*, substitute), jaundice, liver disorders, and as a tonic. Today it is used as a mild laxative, a tonic and a remedy for headaches.