

*Cornus nuttallii*

[Synonyms : *Benthamidia nuttallii*, *Cynoxylon nuttallii*]

**PACIFIC DOGWOOD** is a deciduous shrub or tree. Native to western North America (especially California) it has small fragrant purple or greenish flowers surrounded by petal-like, pink-tinged, white leaves (bracts) and leaves which turn red and yellow in Autumn.

It is also known as American dogwood, California dogwood, Flowering dogwood, Mountain dogwood, Nuttall's dogwood, Western dogwood, and Western flowering dogwood.

Pacific dogwood can flower twice in a year with fruit and fresh flowers appearing simultaneously.

Pacific dogwood is a protected species in British Columbia (Canada) at least.

*Nuttallii* commemorates an English printer, botanist, plant collector and ornithologist, Thomas Nuttall (1786-1859), who attracted the title 'the father of Western American botany'. He collected plants in the United States from about 1808 until just before the outbreak of the Anglo-American War of 1812-1815 which enabled a brief return to England with many plant species which had until then evaded the scientific community. Returning to the United States at War's end he again collected plants and from 1825-1834 was curator of the botanical gardens at Harvard University. At the same time he published works on plants, his travels, and ornithology. But Nuttall had itchy feet. He joined another expedition going out West under the leadership of the American explorer, Nathaniel Jarvis Wyeth (1802-1856), then visited Hawaii and returned to explore the Pacific Northwest. From 1836-1841 he worked for what is now the The Academy of Natural Sciences, Philadelphia and then he finally returned to England to accept an inheritance following an uncle's death and there published, in particular, a work on North American trees. He collected Pacific dogwood when crossing the Rocky Mountains in 1834. In actual fact authorities note that David Douglas (1798-1834) the famous Scottish botanist, discovered this plant (among many others in that region) in about 1826 but it was not identified as a distinct species until collected later by Thomas Nuttall.

The Saanich North American Indians used the bark for tanning and the Thompson Indians obtained a brown dye from it and, as an ingredient with others, a black dye was also achieved. The bark was an ingredient in a tobacco mixture occasionally smoked by the Salish tribe.

Sticks of Pacific dogwood served as cooking tools for the Snohomish Indians, while branches were used by some of the Pomo Indians for making cradles or baby baskets – and by the Thompson tribe for fuel in their saunas. Charcoal made from the wood offered a tattooing medium for the Quinault Indians.

The berries played a role in some ceremonial rituals for both the Hoh and Quileute North American Indians – as did the dried leaves that were smoked by both tribes. The whole plant was viewed as a good luck charm, authorities tell us, by the Karok Indians.

Then there was the hard, strong wood itself that served a range of purposes. It was made into bows, arrows and harpoons for hunting and fishing by the Skagit, Thompson and Salish Indians. Records indicate that the Thompson tribe used this wood also for tool handles,

and it was fashioned into gambling discs too by several North American Indian tribes, including the Skagit and Klallam Indians.

For one or two North American Indian tribes the bark also offered a source of medicine. It seems to have been used specifically by the Thompson Indians for treating some blood and stomach disorders, while the Lummi prescribed it as a laxative and the Hoh and Quileute tribes took it as a tonic.

Although it is believed that Thomas Nuttall sent seeds to England in about 1835, the Pacific dogwood grew at the Botanic Gardens at Kew only from 1904 and the first blooms appeared there in 1909.

The fruit, although unpalatable, can be used as emergency rations.

The heavy, light brown wood has been used for cabinetwork and to make tool handles.

Pacific dogwood is the floral emblem of the western Canadian province of British Columbia.

Medicinally, the bark has been used to treat fever. In fact in the 1860s, during the American Civil War when quinine (*Cinchona officinalis*) was unobtainable, Pacific dogwood was the prized alternative.