

Although some tree specialists claim they are not capable of growing successfully in Central Nebraska, for the past twenty to twenty-five years, ours have performed exceptionally well. We've done little to aid their performance other than routine care. I'm writing about a species of tree called *Cornus florida*, more commonly known as flowering dogwood.

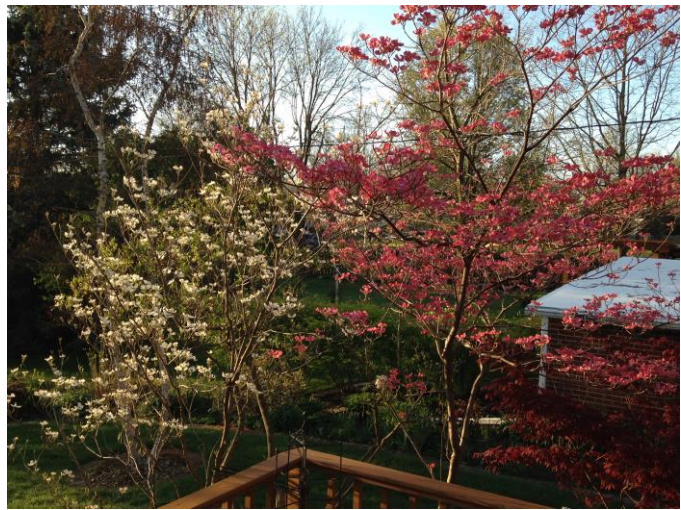


Flowering dogwood is typically a small, deciduous tree that grows fifteen to twenty-five feet in height and ten to fifteen feet in width. I call it *A Tree for all Seasons*. I'll explain later.

Flowering dogwood is often referred to as an understory tree. The USDA rating for this tree is Zones 5 to 9. In its native habitat, it is usually found growing in wooded areas beneath larger trees forming the understory. It has a low-branching habit, forming a flat-topped appearance. Mostly native to the eastern part of the United States, it ranges from Maine to Florida. Flowering dogwood

is the state tree of Missouri and Virginia. One is more apt to see flowering dogwood growing in the eastern part of Nebraska versus central or western Nebraska, and the biggest reason for that is the tree prefers a more acidic soil versus alkali which is the profile of most soils in central and western Nebraska. Not to boast, but as mentioned earlier, we have had flowering dogwoods growing successfully in our yard for nearly a quarter century.

Over the years, I've read many articles supporting the opinion that flowering dogwood is one of the most beautiful Native American flowering trees. I whole heartedly agree with that opinion. Currently, our dogwoods are in full bloom and their radiant beauty is exceptional this season. They certainly out-shine the many other spring flowering trees and shrubs we have growing in our landscape. My biggest disappointment with dogwoods is that they, like most all flowering trees, only bloom for two to three weeks out of fifty-two. However, unlike most other flowering trees that disappear into the background after blooming, flowering dogwoods continue to perform in other ways. That is why I call them *A Tree for all Seasons*.



Dogwoods bloom in early spring (April) usually overlapping the bloom period of redbuds. Dogwood flowers appear before the leaves. The actual flowers are exceptionally tiny, forming yellowish-green, button-like clusters. Each button-like cluster is surrounded by four showy, petal-like bracts that open flat, giving the appearance of a single, large, two-to-three inch diameter, four-petaled flower. These bracts are usually white or pinkish-red in color depending on the cultivar. Following the flowers, small bright red berries appear, maturing in late summer.



These bitter, non-edible fruits for humans are craved and quickly devoured by birds and other wildlife. Toward the end of blooming, dogwood leaves quickly develop forming attractive three-to-five inch long, oval-shaped, dark green leaves. These attractive green leaves become even more attractive in autumn when they turn a brilliant burgundy-red color.

I do realize that if the lowest USDA rating for a plant is Zone 5, it is understood that under normal conditions such a plant should succeed growing in Central Nebraska. However, we do know that Nebraska does have its odd ball years with out-of-the-norm cold in the winter and out-of-the-norm heat in the summer. If one were to consider planting flowering dogwood in his or her landscape, I suggest choosing a site somewhat protected from the full brunt of the elements. As stated earlier, there are those who claim dogwoods will not grow successfully in Central Nebraska; however, from experience I say, "Give them a chance; they are certainly worth it."