

Flowering Dogwood

Cornus florida

The flowering dogwood is a common understory tree in our area, growing up to 30 feet tall, usually in the shade of taller trees. It is one of our most beautiful trees as well, especially in early springtime before its leaves come out. The blooms are clusters of tiny yellow-greenish flowers surrounded by four showy white bracts, which are really leaves, but look like flowers.

In fall, the leaves turn shades of red to reddish-purple and clusters of small shiny red berries form. These berries remain on the tree after the leaves fall, and are eaten by many kinds of birds. Squirrels, skunks, deer and other animals also eat the berries, but they are toxic to humans. Deer feed on dogwood leaves in spring and summer.

Native Americans used parts of the dogwood in making some red dyes, and also used parts of the bark and roots in making some medicines.



Many tribes preferred the wood of the dogwood tree for their arrows, because it is hard and shock-resistant. Dogwood bark was also used in ridding dogs of mange, which perhaps led to the tree being called “dogwood.”

