

## Gray Dogwood



# Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)

## General Description

A dense-branched shrub (or small tree form) native to North America as far west as eastern North and South Dakota. Very attractive shrub in flower for public and private landscapes. Tree form has potential as small tree in sites where restricted height is needed. Plant taxonomists are in the process of changing the species name to *C. foemina*.

## Leaves and Buds

Bud Arrangement - Opposite.

Bud Color - Grayish-brown, lateral buds, small and somewhat hidden by the leaf scar.

Bud Size - Less than ¼ inch.

Leaf Type and Shape - Simple, narrow-ovate.

Leaf Margins - Entire.

Leaf Surface - Pubescent to smooth.

Leaf Length - 2 to 4 inches.

Leaf Width - 1 to 2 inches.

Leaf Color - Dark green above, whitish-gray beneath. Purple fall color.

## Flowers and Fruits

Flower Type - Cymes 2 to 3 inches diameter, showy; borne on the ends of each stem.

Flower Color - White.

Fruit Type - Drupe, ¼-inch diameter.

Fruit Color - White, ornamental, often abundant.

## Form

Growth Habit - Multistem shrub to a small accent tree.

Texture - Medium, summer; medium, winter.

Crown Height - 8 to 15 feet.

Crown Width - 10 to 15 feet.

Bark Color - Young stems are tan to reddish-brown, mature stems and trunks silvery-gray.

Root System - Fibrous, some suckering.

## Environmental Requirements

### Soils

Soil Texture - Sandy loam to clay.

Soil pH - 5.0 to 7.8.

## Cold Hardiness

USDA Zone 3.

## Water

Prefers moist, well-drained sites, but is tolerant of dry conditions.

## Light

Full sun to shaded sites.

## Uses

### Conservation/Windbreaks

Multirow windbreaks in moist to semimoist locations in large shrub row.

### Wildlife

Cover, shelter and food (fruit, foliage, twigs) source for birds and mammals, including browsers.

### Agroforestry Products

Medicinal - Extracts from various species of *Cornus* have been used for fevers and as a tooth powder.

### Urban/Recreational

Excellent for home landscapes and parks as a large shrub for massing or screening or as a small tree for aesthetic values.

## Cultivated Varieties

NDSU has introduced two cultivars:

Snow Lace® Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa* 'Emerald') - Dense, tall shrub, glossy dark leaves, excellent flower and fruit quality, pink pedicels.

Snow Mantle® Gray Dogwood (*C. racemosa* 'Jade') - Taller growing, more treelike, leaves less glossy. Best grown multi-trunked since this species suckers somewhat. Attractive white flowers and fruits.

## Related Species

Redosier Dogwood (*Cornus stolonifera*) - See Redosier Dogwood.

Pagoda Dogwood (*C. alternifolia*) - Form is treelike, layered branches, creamy-white flowers, dark blue fruits, not drought tolerant.

Siberian Dogwood (*C. alba* 'Sibirica') - Vigorous, superior bright red stems, recommended.

Variegated Dogwood (*C. alba* 'Argenteo-marginata') - Foliage variegated.

## Pests

No major pests to date.



## GRAY DOGWOOD

*Cornus racemosa* Lam.

Plant Symbol = CORA6

Contributed by: USDA NRCS Plant Materials Program



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### Uses

Gray dogwood is useful as a low-growing wild hedge which provides summer food and some cover for small animals and birds.

### Status

Please consult the PLANTS Web site and your State Department of Natural Resources for this plant's current status (e.g. threatened or endangered species, state noxious status, and wetland indicator values).

### Description

*Cornus racemosa* Lam, gray dogwood, is a thickly branched, slow growing dogwood seldom more than 6 feet high at maturity. Its flowers, which bloom in June or July, are white and loosely clustered, and its white fruit, which appears in September and October, is set off by bright red fruit-stalks. Its leaves are opposite, taper-pointed and oval.

### Adaptation

Gray dogwood has a range of adaptability equaled by few other shrubs, and it tolerates many climatic conditions. Tolerance to shade is considered

intermediate. It is not well adapted to coastal plain conditions.

Gray dogwood is distributed throughout the northeastern United States. For a current distribution map, please consult the Plant Profile page for this species on the PLANTS Website.

### Establishment

Only seedlings of gray dogwood are practical. All should be planted as early in the spring as possible. When using dogwood for streambank planting, eroded or steep banks should be graded before planting. Plant in the early spring with dormant planting stock. Planting after May will severely reduce chances for success. One-year rooted cuttings or seedlings can be planted vertically into the bank with one or two inches of cutting wood protruding. They should be stuck in a hole large enough to accommodate the root system when well spread. The soil must be tamped well around the roots. Fresh, unrooted hardwood cuttings, easier to handle but less reliable, should be stuck vertically into the bank, leaving one to two inches above ground. A dibble can be used to make a hole. Tamp adequately to provide complete contact between the cutting and the soil. Cuttings may also be buried horizontally two inches deep in damp soil, if the ground is stony. Fresh hardwood cuttings, 3/8 to 1/2 inch at the thick end, 9 inches long, and made while dormant, are ideal. Without cold storage, planting should be done as soon as possible after cutting. Plant both rooted cuttings and unrooted hardwood cuttings on 2 feet spacing in a diamond pattern.

When using for wildlife or screening purposes, the planting site should be cultivated to destroy existing vegetation. If not, the sod should be removed from an area two feet across for each plant. The holes should be deep enough to allow for the full extension of the roots. Spacing for hedges and screens should be staggered and 2 x 2 feet, and 4 to 5 feet for windbreaks. A small handful of fertilizer can be placed around each plant.

### Management

Dogwoods used on streambanks are subject to mechanical damage. The site should be inspected annually for needed repairs in the spring after heavy runoff or ice floes. Fill in gaps by replanting or by laying down and covering branches of nearby plants. Any mechanical measures used to control the bank,

such as riprap, must be kept in repair to maintain effective protection.

Competing vegetation should be controlled around all dogwood plants used for hedges, screens, etc. This is particularly important during the first few years after planting.

#### **Pests and Potential Problems**

There are currently no serious pests of gray dogwood.

#### **Cultivars, Improved, and Selected Materials (and area of origin)**

No cultivars are available at this time, however common seedlings are available at most commercial hardwood nurseries.

#### **Prepared By & Species Coordinator:**

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For more information about this and other plants, please contact your local NRCS field office or Conservation District, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://Plant-Materials.nrcs.usda.gov>>

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