

Pagoda Dogwood

*This article was written by:
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The Pagoda Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) is a native plant that grows from the Mississippi River east from Zones three to seven. It grows in woods, thickets and on rocky slopes where it forms a small clump tree. It has been cultivated since 1880 and it is the only hardy dogwood tree in Minnesota. Although it grows naturally as a multi-stemmed shrub, it is commonly found as a single-stemmed tree about 25-feet high with a spread of about 20-feet. It has platform like stories of branches of dark green foliage. The horizontal whorled branching gives an excellent landscape effect during any season of the year. The leaves are alternate (hence its genus name) and tend to grow toward the ends of the horizontal branches. The young stems are deep purplish-brown and the older stems and trunk are gray. Its fragrant blossoms open in early June. The fruits last about a month before these purplish black treats on red stems are discovered by the birds. Fall color is variable, going from no color at all to dark red or purple. The coloring depends upon the weather conditions, the site and the plant itself.



It is fairly tolerant of home landscape conditions, but it prefers moist, acidic, well-drained soil and partial shade. It needs to be protected from the winter winds. A good home landscape site would be under a large tree with other shrubs and perennials. It is subject to twig die back when it is planted in an open site. It can have some leaf spot problems in wet years, but has few other pests. But this plant can be short lived due to cankers. The best preventative is to keep it as stress free as possible, planting it in a site that best replicates its natural environment. The result will be an ornamental tree pleasing to the homeowner's senses and a good source of food for the birds.