



BWSR Featured Plant

Name: Red-Osier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)

Plant Family: Cornaceae

Statewide Wetland
Indicator Status:

- FACW



Multiple, red stems in early spring

Known for its vibrant red bark, red-osier dogwood is easy to spot in the landscape during the fall and winter months. It produces white flower clusters in May that are used by a wide variety of pollinators. As a large deciduous shrub, *Cornus sericea* is a vigorous, suckering species that flourishes in many open, moist conditions and is a favorite landscape plant for aesthetics and attracting wildlife. It is also commonly used to stabilize shorelines as part of bioengineering practices.



White fruit (drupes)

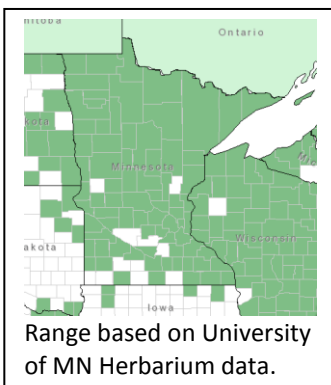
Identification

Growing up to nine feet high, *Cornus sericea* has multiple smooth, red, ascending stems that are covered with numerous white lenticels and rings at the twig nodes. The branches contain a whitish pith (compared to brown piths of silky dogwood and tan piths in grey dogwood). The leaves of red-osier dogwood are opposite, oval to lance-like in shape (two to four inches long) and have smooth margins with a rounded base. The clusters of white flowers are about two inches wide at the ends of the stem. The flowers form round creamy white fruits (drupes) about ¼ inch diameter and usually contain one seed.



Red twigs with white lenticels and dark rings at twig nodes

Range



As a species that occurs independently or in shrub-dominated communities, red-osier dogwood is frequently found with willows, speckled alder, and bog birch in sunny, wet to mesic habitats. Swamps, marshes, fens, meadows, lakeshores and even some uplands including old fields and woodland edges provide the best growing conditions with poorly drained, moderately acidic to neutral soils. The species is particularly common in fire-prone sites where it can vigorously re-sprout without competition. It is common over most of Minnesota and is found from Ohio to Maine and south to northern Virginia.

Uses

Red-osier dogwood is intolerant to drought but flourishes in saturated conditions, making it well suited for streambank protection projects, slope stabilization, and fish and wildlife habitats. The flowers are a source of nectar and pollen for many insects such as native bees, wasps, flies and butterflies, and the fruit provide food to wood ducks, song birds, upland gamebird and some small rodents. *Cornus sericea* has also been a species of great cultural significance for Native Americans. While many parts of the plant were used for medicinal remedies, such as tonics for headache, sore throats or a wash for ulcers, the inner bark is still used in tobacco mixtures for sacred pipe ceremonies. The stems are made into dreamcatchers, arrows, stakes or other tools, and the fruit is eaten fresh or mashed into a fruit paste with chokecherries or serviceberries.

Primary Uses:

- Erosion control
- Habitat
- Ornamental
- Ethnobotanical

Planting Recommendations

Planting can be accomplished with seed, cuttings, containerized plants, or by transplanting. When seeding, the best germination is obtained when the seeds are gathered and removed from the ripe fruit in August to October and sown directly into moist soil. Cuttings can be collected in winter and then stored in dark, cool (but not freezing) conditions, but it is most common to collect them in early spring shortly before they will be used for bioengineering practices. Cuttings should be inserted around one to three feet into moist soil depending on the size of the cuttings. Augers with metal rods are sometimes used to make holes prior to inserting cuttings. Red-osier dogwood can also be planted as bare root plants in the spring or as containerized plants.

Planting Methods

- Seed
- Cuttings
- Containerized Plants
- Transplants

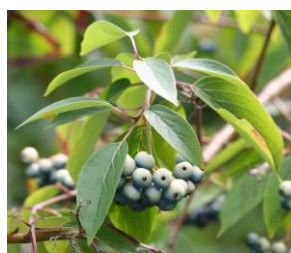


Flat clusters of white flowers

Similar Species



Gray Dogwood (*Cornus racemosa*)



Silky Dogwood (*Cornus amomum*)



Pagoda Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*)

Due to its showy stems, red-osier dogwood is generally easy to identify. However, all dogwoods have small white clusters of flowers in the summer. By reviewing the stem color, grey dogwood is defined by smooth grey bark with some wart-like bumps while silky dogwood has purplish bark. Pagoda dogwood has green, smooth stems.

References

Minnesota Wildflowers: <https://www.minnesotawildflowers.info/shrub/red-osier-dogwood>

USDA Plants Database: http://plants.usda.gov/plantguide/pdf/cs_cose16.pdf

Eloise Butler: <http://www.friendsofthewildflowergarden.org/pages/plants/redosierdogwood.html>

Illinois Wildflowers: http://www.illinoiswildflowers.info/trees/plants/ro_dogwood.htm

Trees and Shrubs of Minnesota by Welby R. Smith