

Red Twig Dogwoods

Tatarian Dogwood (*Cornus alba*) and Redosier Dogwood (*Cornus sericea*)

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There are two species of dogwoods that have showy red stems in the winter, Tatarian dogwood (*Cornus alba*) and redosier dogwood (*C. sericea*). Both are deciduous medium to large shrubs and have similar flowering and fruit characteristics, as well as cultural aspects. Thus, the general information (Summary, Plant Needs, Functions, and Care) will be presented for both species). Each species has several cultivars that vary in stem color and foliage variegation; cultivar information will be presented for each species in the Additional Information section.

Red Twig Dogwoods

Cornus alba and *Cornus sericea*

Summary:

Foliage: About 3 inch long leaves; deciduous

Height: About 8 feet

Spread: About 8 feet

Shape: Loose, wide-spreading upright shrub; will sucker to form a large colony of stems

Main features: The red stem dogwood species, tatarian and redosier dogwoods, are large multi-stem fast-growing suckering deciduous shrubs (tatarian dogwood may or may not sucker). Their claim-to-fame is their stems that turn bright red to dark red in the winter (stems are greenish during the growing season). These dogwoods certainly add a WOW! factor to a winter landscape. They are best used in mass in the landscape to emphasize and accentuate the cold season red stem color. There are cultivars of both species that have showy white variegated leaves, and there are cultivars of redosier dogwood that have showy bright yellow stems in winter. Both species are tolerant of poor growing conditions (dry or wet soil). They do have some disease issues, stem canker and leaf spot, but disease problems such as leaf spot can be quite a problem; most cultivars are prone to some stem canker but susceptibility and degree of disease incidence is related to local climate and cultivar susceptibility. Disease problems are more prevalent in the southern end of their adaptability range (zone 7) and plants in these hot areas will languish. Since the red winter color is most pronounced on young stems, regular pruning is necessary to encourage new stem production. This is accomplished by 1) removing about one-third of the largest (oldest) stems in the early spring, or 2) cutting all stems down to 9 inches above ground level about every three years. Both species produce flat-topped flowers (not typical of the flowering dogwood) and these are attractive at a close inspection but not from a distance. The close-up appreciation aspect is also true for the fruit of both species which is white or whitish.

Plant Needs:

Zone: 3 to 7 for tatarian dogwood; 2 to 7 for redosier dogwood; both species are much more disease prone and will languish in the heat of zone 7

Light: Full sun to part shade

Moisture: Wet to dry

Soil type: Most soils

pH: Acid to alkaline

Functions:

These dogwoods are best used in mass and in borders in the landscape to emphasize and accentuate the red cold season stem color (the more plants used, the more spectacular the show). They are quite spectacular in snow due to the contrasting colors. The yellow stem cultivars of redosier dogwood show up especially well when placed in front of a dark background, such as dark-leaved conifers or evergreen hollies.

Care:

Since the red winter color is most pronounced on young stems, regular pruning is necessary to encourage new stem production. This is accomplished by 1) removing about one-third of the largest (oldest) stems in the early spring, or 2) cutting all stems down to 9 inches above ground level about every three years.

Additional Information:

Some notable cultivars of tatarian dogwood (*Cornus alba*) are:

'Argento-marginata' leaves with white margins and gray-green center; moderately susceptible to leaf spot

'Aurea' yellow leaves throughout the growing season if not stressed; somewhat susceptible to leaf spot

'Bloodgood' good red stem color;

Ivory Halo™ leaves with white margins and green center; tends to be compact; moderately susceptible to leaf spot

'Sibirica' showy bright red stems; several red stem forms (perhaps seedlings) in the trade being sold as 'Sibirica', hence a confusing situation

'Spaethii' leaves with yellow margins and green center

Some notable cultivars of redosier dogwood (*Cornus sericea*) are:

'Bud's Yellow' yellow stems in winter; sometimes listed as a cultivar of tatarian dogwood;

'Cardinal' brilliant red stems in winter

'Flaviramea' bright yellow stems in winter

'Silver and Gold' leaves with white margins, very attractive; yellow winter stems