

# *Cornus racemosa* - Gray Dogwood (*Cornaceae*)

*Cornus racemosa* is a spreading, dense, stoloniferous shrub. Subtly attractive in flower, fruit, and fruiting stalk, and tolerant of wet or dry sites, Gray Dogwood is a multi-season interest plant. This highly adaptable shrub is ideally suited for wet sites, dry sites, naturalized areas, neglected areas, borders, embankments, or mass plantings, in sunny to shady sites

## FEATURES

### Form

-medium- to large-sized deciduous shrub, or small single- to multi-trunked deciduous ornamental tree  
-the true multi-stemmed shrub form often matures at 8' tall x 8' wide, but if culturally pruned and maintained to a few stems, these become arching trunks whose canopy can reach 15' tall x 15' wide  
-the shrub form tends to sucker so profusely that it forms colonies that are excellent for naturalized areas or for embankments in need of erosion control  
-shrub forms have an upright clump growth habit in youth, becoming either a spreading mound or open and straggly with age  
-tree forms are also available (from seedling selections) which do not sucker from the base, having one to several trunks  
-tree forms have an upright oval growth habit in youth, becoming rounded with age  
-slow to medium growth rate (except for rapid-growing suckers that arise from the base of established shrubs)



### Culture

-full sun to full shade; performs best in full sun to partial sun  
-prefers moist, well-drained soils but is adaptable to many adverse conditions, including poor soils, dry soils, or wet soils  
-propagated by rooted cuttings or by seeds  
-Dogwood Family, with few disease or pest problems  
-moderate availability, in B&B or container form  
-somewhat sensitive to being transplanted in autumn (less so for containerized plants), and care should be taken to amend the soil, fertilize, water thoroughly, mulch liberally, and avoid winter salt spray, to enhance winter survival

### Foliage



-medium green to gray-green leaves are about 3" long  
-opposite, narrow elliptical, and acuminate, with major leaf veins parallel to the curving leaf margins  
-autumn color is a mixture

of green, purple, and red in Oct. and is usually not showy

### Flowers

-creamy hemispherical inflorescences are up to 2" in diameter, effective for 1 week in late May or early June



### Fruits

-creamy white (rarely porcelain blue) round 0.25" fruits mature in clusters in Aug. and Sept.  
-fruits are not persistent due to rapid abscission and bird/squirrel feeding, but the persistent bright red hemispherical pedicels (fruiting stalks) retain their color into early winter and have a long-lasting appeal

### Twigs

-very thin stems are dark red to purplish-red  
-buds are lighter-colored and very small

### Trunk

-dense multi-stemmed forms (the normal situation) do not form sufficient caliper on individual stems to become trunks, but individual shrubs pruned to a few stems develop into several prominent trunks that arch with age  
-bark changes from reddish-brown to gray (hence the common name) with age, with the bark becoming broken into distinctly square blocks, very much like Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) in bark appearance.

## USAGE

### Function

-shrub form is useful for mass plantings, borders, embankments, non-thorny informal barrier hedges, wildlife attraction, naturalization, and at the edge of bodies of water  
-tree form is useful for foundations, entranceways, borders or as a specimen

### Texture

-fine texture in foliage and when bare  
-thick density in foliage and medium to thick density when bare

### Assets

-suckering and dense shrub habit is excellent for embankment erosion control or in naturalized areas  
-single- or multi-trunked tree forms are fine ornamental trees that are underutilized in the modern landscape  
-early summer creamy-white inflorescences  
-late summer white or porcelain blue fruits  
-persistent red fruit stalks are attractive into early winter  
-adaptable to wet or dry sites and poor soils

### Liabilities

-dense shrub form often gets out of hand due to straggleness and suckering with age (this can be remedied by rejuvenation pruning to the ground)

### Habitat

-Zones 5 to 8  
-Native to Eastern and Midwestern U.S. and Southern Canada

## SELECTIONS

### Alternates

-shrubs tolerant of dry or wet sites  
-naturalizing or erosion control shrubs  
-shrubs for winter interest  
-dense shrubs of medium size with good floral and fruit character

### Variants

-*Cornus racemosa*, although rarely sold in "tree form" (that is, as a single- or multi-trunked non-suckering form), can be a handsome small ornamental tree, good for foundations, entranceways, borders, or as a specimen