

Cornus Coloured Stemmed Dogwoods - Growing Guide

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Species of coloured stemmed dogwoods come from Siberia, North America and Europe. As such they are some of the hardiest and toughest plants that you will ever grow in the garden. All but the dwarf varieties will grow up to around 10ft in height with a broadly similar eventual spread if left unpruned. Unlike flowering dogwood trees, which have large prominent bracts backing their flowers, stemmed dogwoods have relatively small and insignificant cymes of mainly white flowers in spring. This is really the point. They are grown for their coloured stems which show up so well as the backdrops to borders especially when they are dormant in the winter. The stems come in several different colours and, to get the best from these plants, you need to prune them back hard to only a few inches above ground level every two to three years. If you do this in early spring the plants will rapidly rejuvenate themselves with new shoots that will grow on to provide a better display of stem colour in the following winters. If you let the plants mature the older stems become woody and you will lose the winter colours.

Growing these plants in full sun ensures that the new growth shoots get a good baking in the growing season and, therefore, better winter colour. These plants tolerate almost any soil conditions and are very easy indeed to grow well in exposed locations. They can make attractive hedges, they look superb alongside the bark of white barked birch, and they often complement a heather bed with winter flowering heathers.

Stemmed Cornus are most easily propagated from hardwood cuttings inserted in bare soil in the autumn with rooting powder. Some varieties readily layer themselves and these rooted plants can easily be moved elsewhere.

C. alba, the Red barked dogwood, perhaps grows best in wet or boggy conditions where it is more vigorous. White fruits tinged blue.

C. alba 'Aurea' has red stems with greenish-yellow leaves turning yellow in autumn.

C. alba 'Elegantissima' has leaves margined and mottled with white.

C. alba 'Kesselringii' has brownish-black or blackish-purple stems in winter.

C. alba 'Siberian Pearls' has the addition of profuse white berries tinged with blue.

C. alba 'Siberica' – bright red winter shoots and red autumn colour.

C. alba 'Spaethii' has golden variegated foliage margins.

C. alba 'Variegata' has silvery-white edged leaves.

C. amomum is also a vigorous, spreading species with dull red-purple winter shoots. Cymes of white flowers in spring and early summer and grey-blue fruits.

C. sanguinea, the Common dogwood, has greenish or greenish flushed red winter stems and red autumn colour.

C. sanguinea 'Midwinter Fire' is more dwarf-growing than other species or varieties with particularly standout orange-yellow and red branches in winter.

C. sericea (*C. stolonifera*) 'Flaviramea', the Yellow stemmed dogwood, perhaps grows best in a bog but is perfectly happy anywhere. Its bright yellow-green winter shoots are also a key feature of any winter garden.

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