

## December 2015 Plant of the Month



*Cornus florida* L., White Dogwood

December's *Plant of the Month* is the native white or Florida dogwood. Although synonymous with spring May flowers, dogwood provides a second season of enjoyment. Dogwood leaves turn a deep purple and maroon color, which hang on the tree for an extended period, often into December. December is associated with a variety of holidays not least of which is Christmas. This holiday is often associated with the colors red and green, a symbol of the winter season. White dogwood's brilliant red berries mature in late summer and early autumn. The fruits hang on the tree until winter migrating thrushes devour the drupes on their flight south. Sometimes trees retain a few of their red fruits into the holiday season, providing another option when providing native species with color and form reminiscent of the season.

*Cornus florida* is an upland FACU plant. It is found throughout the State with the exception of the heart of the Pine Barrens. It is an understory tree scattered by birds, and it is often found along road edges where birds roost. Dogwood has had many uses. The wood is very hard and strong and once was in use as tool handles. Native Americans used roots and bark as a tonic for intestinal problems (Moermen, 1999; *North American Ethnobotany*).

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