

ARISTOCRATIC NATIVE PLANTS ARE LOW MAINTENANCE BEAUTIES

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There are several truly aristocratic native plants which complement many landscape situations. These include dogwood, redbud, shadblow, witch-hazel, and Striped Maple.

Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) often reaches 20 to 25 feet in height with a sympodial or layered habit of growth. Then in full flower, this tree gives a cloud-like or wispy feeling in the woods. The stems are soft, dark grey when young. The bark is dark "alligatored" at maturity. One can expect flowering 3 out of 10 years in unprotected sites (flower buds hardy to 10 degrees above zero); with almost annual blooming in protected courtyards, near buildings, or when an understory for deep-rooted trees, e.g. oak or pine. The flowers usually develop mid to late May throughout the northeast.

Dogwood prefers acid, organic, well-drained soil. Flowering Dogwood is a good specimen plant in protected areas, good as a border tree, or understory plant in naturalized areas. *Cornus florida* is truly a tree for all seasons, due to its unique habit of growth, flowers, rich green foliage during the summer, and, of course, outstanding fall color. When considering maintenance, one should prune rarely, as closure of the wound is usually slow. Red-Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida rubra*) is the most commonly available cultivar. This plant should be used less in more northern areas as its flower buds are less cold temperature hardy.

Pagoda Dogwood (*Cornus alternifolia*) is a native from New Brunswick through Wisconsin

and Minnesota. It is a multiple-stemmed shrub or small tree, reaching 20 to 25 feet in height with that sympodial or horizontal-layered habit of growth. The flowers, light yellow in color, are particularly effective for late spring or early summer color. The foliage is a bright yellow-green throughout the summer with some slight fall purpling. In the northern areas, this regal native is compatible in full sun or as an understory plant. It thrives in acid, well-drained soils.

Pagoda Dogwood can be effectively used in borders for home landscapes and park situations. One should consider this an extremely low maintenance plant and not prune. Pruning or simple wounds can result in cankers — the one main problem this exciting plant is killed by.

Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*), although not a native, should be looked upon as an exciting understory or specimen plant. It is more upright than Flowering Dogwood, usually reaching 20 to 25 feet in height. When young, it is somewhat vase-shaped, becoming oval at maturity. The stems are usually multi-colored, as the plant gets older, with bark exfoliating. Flowering, even in northern areas, is dependable from late May through mid-June after the leaves are out. This tree's flowering bracts are pale to clear white. Further, the flower buds are considerably more low temperature hardy than Flowering Dogwood. The cultivar, *Cornus kousa chinensis* 'Milky Way,' is slightly more spreading in



Raspberry-like fruit of the Kousa Dogwood provides a unique addition to the landscape from late August through October. **Yellow, thread-like flowers** of Common Witch-Hazel in October.

habit of growth, with bracts that are more pointed, giving it a delicate, lacier feeling. *Cornus kousa* can be used as a small tree, specimen, or in mass plantings. It seems to thrive in sunnier locations, as contrasted with Flowering Dogwood, tolerating shade. The fruit is effective in late August through October, being one-half to one-inch in diameter. This reddish, globular-shaped fruit, often resembles raspberries. Although seedy, they are usually quite good to eat.

The summer foliage is a good, exciting green with fall color developing extremely late or not at all. The main contrasts between *Kousa* versus Flowering Dogwood are its ability to thrive in more exposed sites, the upright habit of growth when young, transplants easier, and provides good flower color in late May, while flowering dependably each year later in the season.

Eastern Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*) can be a multiple-stemmed shrub or small tree, reaching 20 to 30 feet in height and width. When young, the plant is somewhat upright, becoming oval at maturity. Young plants have a rich-dark black bark, which becomes rough and reddish at maturity. The heart-shaped leaves are slightly purplish as new growth, becoming rich-dark green for the summer months, with fall color being a clear yellow. Not only is the yellow fall leaf color effective, but the brown pea- or bean-shaped pod adds an interesting contrast to the landscape. The flowers are purplish in bud, contrasting in an exciting way against the black bark, becoming rosy-pink in full bloom. Flowering of redbud is particularly effective, as full bloom occurs in mid to late May before leaf expansion. Redbud requires little pruning; in fact, is very susceptible to wounds. Although closure of the wound often occurs, heartwood decay is a problem even with small wounds.

This plant will take exposed sites as a specimen or integrates well in a shrub or tree border. In fact, redbud thrives when the root system is shaded or cooled by non-competitive shrubs. It grows best in rich, deep, loamy, well-drained soils. The cultivar, White-Flowering American Redbud (*Cercis canadensis* 'alba'), has an almost identical habit of growth, flowering period, and general response, as does the species with one exciting difference — the flower color. Although there are several other cultivars available, confusion in the trade renders seedlings a better value.

Shadblow (*Amelanchier canadensis*) is another regal native. This gray, multiple-stemmed shrub or small tree is a herald of spring. The good, clear, white flowers, contrasted by the silver-green foliage in late April or early May, make this an outstanding plant in native plantings, as understory, or a specimen shrub. Shadblow vary from 8 to 20 feet in height, usually being somewhat vase-shaped. The summer foliage is a clear, rich-dark green, con-

trasted when young against gray bark and when old against black and gray-stripped bark. In the fall, shadblow's oval-shaped leaves range in color from scarlet to yellow, literally painting much of our woodland landscape. This plant rarely requires pruning and should be considered outstanding in low maintenance areas.

Common Witch-Hazel (*Hamamelis virginiana*) is usually a multiple-stemmed shrub that reaches 25 feet in height, but can be trained into a small tree. The yellow, thread-like flowers are an exciting addition to the fall landscape (October). Individual branches are often horizontal, giving the illusion of a Flowering Dogwood branch. The dark gray stem accents the clear yellow-brown fall color which helps this understory plant "light-up" the landscape. It is a good border or specimen understory plant for naturalized areas in large home or park landscapes. Witch-hazel thrives in sandy, yet poorly drained soils. It isn't host for a major insect or disease. Common Witch-Hazel is a hardy, low maintenance pest-free plant.

Striped Maple (*Acer pensylvanicum*), a native of southern Canada and northern United States, is an exciting understory plant. Its large red buds open to showy yellow-green flowers, making this an outstanding native. This small tree is somewhat open yet rounded in habit. The summer leaves are a sparkling yellow-green. Striped Maple is rarely affected by insects and diseases, while being somewhat drought tolerant. Fall color has been noted on some plants but rarely develops. Its green and white-stripped bark can be a unique addition to the winter landscape. This low maintenance, relatively insect and disease-free small tree, is an outstanding addition to naturalized areas but is rarely available in the trade.

These aristocratic or regal natives should be considered for low maintenance areas. They require little or no pruning, are perfectly hardy, yet in most instances, grow extensively throughout the northeastern and central U.S. These plants add exciting spring color to the landscape. Shadblow, Flowering Dogwood head the list, with Redbud, Pagoda Dogwood, *Kousa* Dogwood, Striped Maple, and Common Witch-Hazel soon following. These plants are good as understory or mass border plantings, with Redbud, Flowering Dogwood, and *Kousa* Dogwood, outstanding as specimen trees when planted in protected sites. They are unique in that damage by lawn mower or pruning shears is slow to heal; therefore, wounding, in general, should be minimized or heartwood rot will be a problem. Transplanting is relatively successful for *Amelanchier*, Pagoda Dogwood, *Kousa* Dogwood, with Flowering Dogwood being more difficult, and Eastern Redbud, Striped Maple, and witch-hazel being most difficult. Once established in the landscape, few insects or diseases affect these truly regal plants.

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