

Selecting ornamentals

Understanding how different plants respond in different regions might help you find something new for your client

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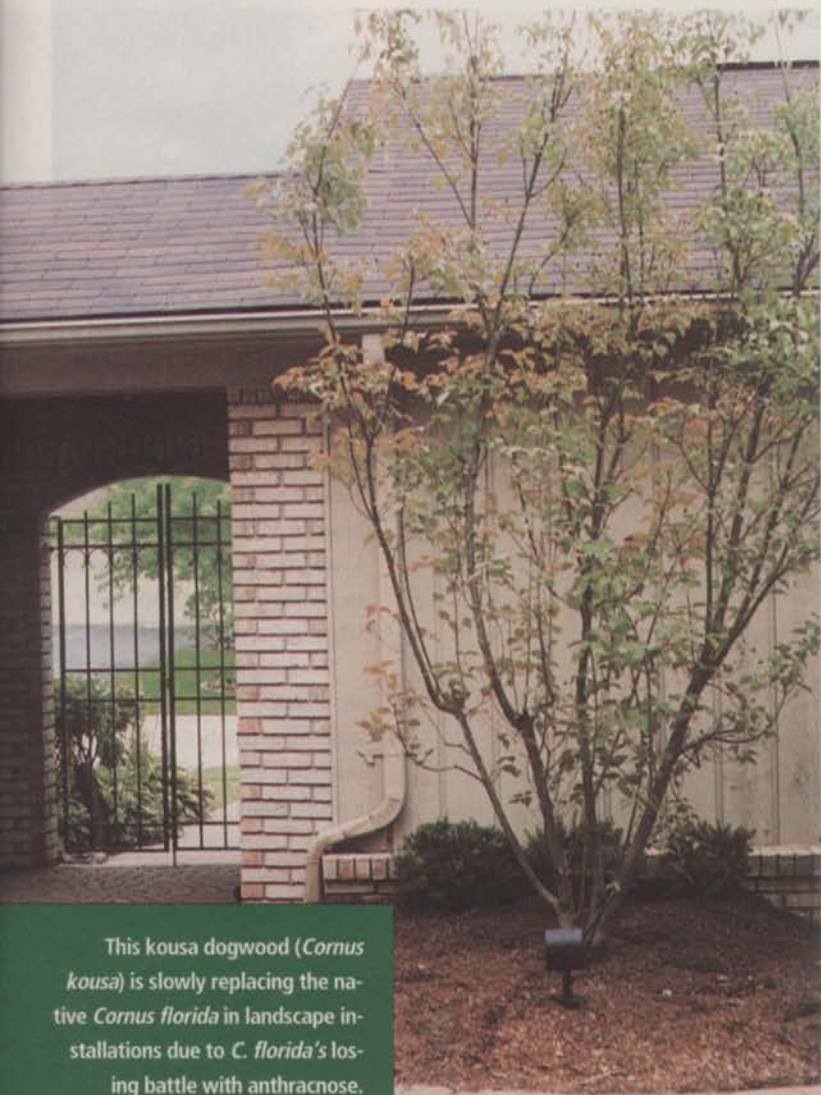
Over the years, hundreds of articles have been written on selecting plants. That's because there are hundreds of things to think about when selecting ornamentals. I want to propose two new ways of thinking about plants for your customers or yourself: Know the differences and try something new.

Know the differences

Plants rarely browse the references written about them. If they did, they'd find many of these references are written at a national or even international level. With such a broad scope of coverage, there could be some confusion when palms, which don't survive in northern climates, are listed in a general reference manual. More confusion may occur when looking at plants that survive in Florida that have a related species that grows in Minnesota, or the same species grows in both locations to a much different outcome. The *Viburnum* species has plants adapted to Florida, but different ones grow in Minnesota. Plants installed in different regions, though the same, behave differently.

Also, plant catalogs advertise nationally. Though these catalogs may solve the problem of availability, plants listed may not live in a specific region.

Plants respond differently in Florida than they would in Minnesota and vice versa. Therefore, cast a



This kousa dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) is slowly replacing the native *Cornus florida* in landscape installations due to *C. florida*'s losing battle with anthracnose.

TABLE 1

Plant	Location
<i>Cornus florida</i> (flowering dogwood)	Michigan: understory tree, protect from wind & salt North Carolina: full sun turf tree, street
<i>Buddleia davidii</i> (butterfly bush)	Michigan: tender woody plants, dies back down to ground, grows 4 to 6 ft., good use in a perennial garden New Mexico: woody shrubs, grows 6 to 15 ft., use in perennial border or informal shrub mass
<i>Tsuga canadensis</i>	Kentucky: can use for street tree (Canadian hemlock) Michigan: needs wind and salt protection, partial shade
<i>Rhododendron catawbiense</i>	Michigan: avoid western and southern exposure, protect from northern winds, grows 4 to 6 ft., possibly a little larger if well cared for. Pennsylvania: good evergreen screen, grows 10 to 16 ft.

TABLE 2

Plant	Substitution
<i>Cornus florida</i> (flowering dogwood)	<i>Cornus kousa</i> (kousa dogwood)
<i>Hemerocallis</i> (daylily)	<i>Liriope spicata</i> (creeping lily turf)
<i>Craetaegus sp.</i> (hawthorne)	<i>Chionanthus virginicus</i> (white fringe tree)
<i>Acer sacharum</i> (sugar maple)	<i>Cladrastis lutea</i> (yellowwood)
<i>Euonymus alata</i> 'Compacta' (burning bush)	<i>Viburnum dentatum</i> (arrowwood viburnum)
<i>Syringa vulgaris</i> (common lilac)	<i>Vitex agnus negundo</i> (lilac chaste tree)
<i>Azalea sp.</i> (rhododendron)	<i>Daphne x burkwoodii</i> (burkwood daphne)
<i>Juniperis horizontalis</i>	<i>Microbiota decussata</i> (Russian cypress)
<i>Spiraea bumalda</i> 'Goldflame'	<i>Callicarpa dichotoma</i> (beautyberry)
<i>Picea abies</i> 'Conica' (dwarf alberta spruce)	<i>Sciadopitys verticillata</i> (Japanese umbrella pine)
<i>Cotoneaster horizontalis</i> (rockspray cotoneaster)	<i>Erica</i> or <i>Caluna sp.</i> (heath or heather)
<i>Hydrangea sp.</i>	<i>Aronia melanocarpa</i> (black chokeberry)
<i>Amelanchier sp.</i>	<i>Amelanchier sp.</i> (nothing beats a good amelanchier!)

critical eye at reference information. References describing zone and habit often give a wide range of variability. For example, a plant that thrives in zone 3 acts differently in zone 9. Sometimes it's difficult to gauge what the difference will be. It may be a matter of sur-



This white fringe tree is a multi-stem tree, and has a fragrant white flower in late spring and a yellow fall color. The flowers are pendulous and delicate looking.

vivability. When I told a customer that Bougainvillea didn't grow in Michigan, she thought I was joking! These items need to be kept in mind, especially when using new plants.

Looking at Table 1, you can see that the range of behaviors and characteristics detailed in reference lists may not hold for a plant installed in multiple regions.

Try something new

The good old favorites we select are often our good old favorites for many reasons. They're hardy where they're planted, offer

This amelanchier creates a beautiful arch over some hydrangea. It's difficult to beat as a total package: hardiness, availability, cost, white flowers in spring, open shrub or tree, edible berries, apricot fall color, few disease and pest problems.

good flower, form or color characteristics, are cost effective and readily available. You can never replace a good burning bush, hydrangea or sugar maple, but there are situations where other plants you haven't thought of recently can be used.

Plant selections also change due to pest and disease problems associated with specific plant species. For instance, *Cornus florida* has had a problem in recent years with anthracnose, and cultivars of *Malus* can be selected for hardiness to fireblight and applescab if these diseases are prevalent in a certain region.

Table 2 is a listing of plants with plant



substitution suggestions. These new plant suggestions aren't supposed to replace the old favorites, but, in an installation, one new plant in place of an old one might prove to be exciting not only to the cus-

tomers but to you as well. **LM**

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