

## featured tree

# Pacific Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*)

Cynthia Orlando, ODF Agency Affairs Specialist and certified arborist

The Pacific Dogwood (*Cornus nuttallii*) tree grows 20 to 30 feet tall, and can sometimes reach 50 feet or more.

A species of dogwood native to western North America, Pacific Dogwood leaves are simple, opposite, and oval in shape, with veins that curve to follow the outline of the leaf. Their deep green leaves turn brilliant shades of red in autumn. Bark is reddish-brown, thin, smooth or scaly; fruits are 1/2 “ long, elliptical, and shiny red, or orange.

Although the flowers of this tree are small and inconspicuous, its easily recognizable in the spring for its large, white petals – actually called “bracts” – which are eye-catching and lovely.

In a natural forested environment these trees are usually found in partly shaded locations growing as understory trees. They prefer well-drained acidic soils high in organic matter. In a garden setting they require extra care, as they are very susceptible to anthracnose, a disease caused by the fungus *Discula destructiva*. If you plant one in your yard, be sure to plant it where its trunk will be shaded from the sun. Resist the temptation to give it extra water during the summer months, and use a soaker hose, not an overhead sprinkler.

To best imitate its natural environment, excellent soil drainage is also a must. Native Dogwood has been crossed with Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) to create some beautiful cultivars, including “Venus” and “Starlight.” These cultivars are more resistant to anthracnose.

Besides growing in the Pacific Northwest, Pacific dogwood can also be found in the mountains near San Diego and Los Angeles, and a small number also grows in Northern Idaho, where it is threatened.

The flower is the floral emblem of British Columbia. Sapsuckers, woodpeckers, bluebirds, tree swallows, vireos, thrushes, evening grosbeaks and white-crowned sparrows are just some of the birds attracted to these trees for food and habitat. 🌿



Photo by Cynthia Orlando, ODF

**Many species of dogwood are popular as ornamental trees. To best imitate its natural environment, excellent soil drainage is a must for native dogwood.**