

Wood of The Month

Dogwood – *Cornus florida*



If you like the wood of persimmon, you are bound to like the wood of Missouri's official state tree, Flowering dogwood. There are many similarities between the two woods that even makes dogwood a good substitute for persimmon in many of the items made from persimmon such as golf club heads, bobbins and other turned objects.

The flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida*, is best known for its large, attractive, white, pinkish and rose colored blossoms which appear in the spring and for its brilliant scarlet-colored autumnal foliage. It is a slow-growing tree seldom more than 40 feet in height and has a short trunk 8 to 16 inches in diameter. As the old saying goes, "you can identify a dogwood tree by its bark". Its bark is only about ¼ in. thick and has the texture of alligator hide. Other names that dogwood goes by are, arrow-wood, cornel, false boxwood, Florida dogwood, boxwood, or white cornel.

The rather small heartwood of flowering dogwood is reddish-brown to light chocolate in color, sometimes streaked with mottled white lines. The wide sapwood has a creamy white to pinkish cast and makes up the majority of the wood available for woodworking and turning. The wood texture is fine and uniform. The interlocked grain is very fine, hard and compact. It is sometimes confused with hard maple. It is sometimes difficult to air dry without checking unless the process is done slowly under controlled conditions. The availability as lumber is scarce and it is high priced and sometimes sold by the pound. Therefore, acquiring dogwood usually means cutting it yourself.

Flowering dogwood finishes with glossy smoothness and can be turned with ease because of its close-grained characteristics. The bulk of commercial use is for weaving shuttles. It is also used for mallet heads, spools, bobbins, golf-club heads, tool handles, machinery bearings and charcoal for gunpowder, and sporting goods.

The name dogwood comes from the old word "dag," meaning skewer. As the name suggests, this hard, tough, splinter-free wood was used in making skewers to hold meat together while cooking. Native Americans prepared a scarlet dye from the roots to color their quills and feathers. They also dried the bark of the root to treat malaria, and the early European settlers fought chills and fevers with it; at one time it also was used as a quinine substitute. Dogwood twigs were used by pioneers to brush their teeth. They would peel off the bark, bite the twig and then scrub their teeth. So, if you want to get your teeth into a great turning wood, give dogwood a try. You will be pleased with the experience and outcome.

You can read more about Dogwood at: [Dogwood on the Wood-database](#) and [Dogwood on Wikipedia.org](#).

Written by – Mel Bryan