How to Grow and Care for Red Twig Dogwood

By

[DAVID BEAULIEU](https://www.thespruce.com/david-beaulieu-2130754)

Updated on 09/13/21

 Reviewed by

[KATHLEEN MILLER](https://www.thespruce.com/kathleen-miller-4777056)

**IN THIS ARTICLE**

* [Care](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-red-twig-dogwood-care)
* [Types](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-types-of-red-twig-dogwoods)
* [Propagating](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-propagating-red-twig-dogwoods)
* [Pruning](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-pruning)
* [Common Pests & Plant Diseases](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-common-pests--plant-diseases)
* [Frequently Asked Questions](https://www.thespruce.com/red-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132727#toc-frequently-asked-questions-398430d6-b77c-42e2-8839-80b8fd54c8f4)

 BACK TO TOP

Red twig dogwood will brighten your winter landscaping with its bright red branches, but the shrubs can also provide [four-season interest](https://www.thespruce.com/landscaping-yards-for-4-season-interest-2132003), with beautiful spring blossoms, [variegated leaves](https://www.thespruce.com/pictures-of-variegated-leaves-4069716) during summer, and berries from summer to fall.

Several [dogwood species](https://www.thespruce.com/twelve-species-dogwood-trees-shrubs-subshrubs-3269662) have cultivars with the "red-twig" label as part of the common name. Depending on the variety, these shrubs bear either dark green or variegated leaves (greenish-gray with a white edge) and small white flowers that form in flat clusters. The flowers are succeeded by white berries with hints of blue and green. The fall foliage can pick up hints of rose or gold, but you will be glad that the foliage is deciduous, as the attractive red bark isn't fully visible until the leaves fall.

Dogwood shrubs are normally planted as nursery-grown container plants or ball-and-burlap specimens in the fall or in the early spring. While many dogwoods are rather slow-growing plants, red twig dogwoods are among the faster-growing types. You can expect the plants to add at least 2 feet of growth each year.

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Common Names** | Red-twig dogwood, red osier dogwood, Tatarian dogwood |
| **Botanical Name** | *Cornus servicea, Cornus alba, or Cornus sanguinea* |
| **Family** | *Cornaceae* |
| **Plant Type** | Deciduous flowering shrub |
| **Mature Size** | 6–9 feet tall, 8–12 feet wide |
| **Sun Exposure** | Full sun to part shade |
| **Soil Type** | Fertile, moist soil |
| **Soil pH** | 5.5 to 6.6 (slightly acidic) |
| **Bloom Time** | Spring |
| **Flower Color** | White |
| **Hardiness Zones** | 3–8 (USDA) |
| **Native Area** | North America |

Red Twig Dogwood Care

Red twig dogwoods have good tolerance for most soil and light conditions, and they're one of the few shrubs that thrive in boggy conditions. The best color is on new stems, so a systematic routine of removing a few of the oldest stems each year is recommended. If the shrubs spread too much, use a spade to trim the roots around the base of the plant. The plants can periodically be trimmed back all the way to the ground, which will both rejuvenate the plant and control its growth.

Red twig dogwood shrubs should be planted where they can be easily viewed. For optimal display, grow them against a wall that receives ample sunlight from the south or west in winter. On a more practical level, their widely-spreading root systems make them effective plants for erosion control (for example, on steep bankings). They are excellent for moist woodland plantings.

Light

Red twig dogwoods will tolerate partial shade, but the signature red bark will be brightest if they are planted in [full sun](https://www.thespruce.com/what-is-full-sun-partial-shade-1402372).

Soil

Red twig dogwood bushes are considered good for areas with consistently moist soil (for example, wet spots where homeowners may wish to establish woodland gardens). Work humus into the soil for nutrients. They prefer somewhat [acidic soil](https://www.thespruce.com/what-is-acidic-soil-p2-2130997).

Water

These plants prefer moist areas, thriving in low spots, or along streams or ponds. If there is not a lot of rain, water new plants weekly for the first few months so the soil is constantly moist. Mature plants only need watering during dry spells when there is no rain for more than a week.

Temperature and Humidity

This shrub has adapted to a wide range of temperatures. It does not do well in extremely hot and humid climates where it can be vulnerable to diseases such as canker.

Fertilizer

This plant has low fertilizing needs. If you do fertilize, do so in the early spring, side-dressing it with compost. When it has started to leaf out, you can feed it [fish emulsion](https://www.thespruce.com/fish-emulsion-as-organic-fertilizer-2539760), although it will do fine with any additional feeding.

Types of Red Twig Dogwoods

Different species of dogwood shrubs with red bark can be found around the globe in the Northern Hemisphere. All are classified under the genus *Cornus*:

* **Tatarian dogwoods** (*Cornus alba*) are native to Asia.
* **Red osier dogwoods**(*Cornus sericea*) are native to North America.
* **Bloodtwig dogwoods** (*Cornus sanguinea*) are native to Europe.

The similarities between these species and the similarity in their common names has led to much confusion, even in the nursery trade. If you have your heart set on a particular cultivar, be sure to make your purchase from an establishment that you trust.

If erosion control is a significant reason for your purchase of a red twig dogwood, be sure to seek out the red osier type, specifically. Red osier spreads by suckering to form a colony over time. The root system of such a colony can be very effective at holding back the soil on a hillside. 'Cardinal' is an example of a cultivar to look for.

Propagating Red Twig Dogwoods

If you want to propagate red twig dogwoods, take hardwood cuttings in late fall.

1. Cut a length of stem that is as long as a pencil.
2. Cut the stem piece into 6- to 9-inch sections with a bud near either end of each cutting.
3. Take off side branches (including all leaves) and dip each segment in rooting hormone. Plant the cutting in pots and place in a sheltered area, or in a cold frame that is closed for the winter.
4. In spring, you can open the cold frame or move the pots back into the open to continue growing.
5. It can take up to a full year for the cutting to root. Once they are fully rooted, you can plant the saplings in your landscape.

Pruning

The brightness of this bush's red twigs has a tendency to fade over time from early spring to summer, and there is not much that you can do about that. For maximal color, prune out one-third of the older branches every three years or so (or even annually, as long as you do not mind having a plant of a smaller size). Pruning should be done in late winter or early spring. Such care will promote new growth.

Since the younger branches bear the brightest color, that is precisely the growth that you want to encourage. If the bush is overgrown, you can cut it back to the ground. It will return within a year with young red stems.

Common Pests & Plant Diseases

[Scale](https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-get-rid-of-scale-insects-1402693), leaf miners, and [bagworms](https://www.thespruce.com/bagworms-1402517) are common insect pests.1 Commercial pesticides can be used if the problem becomes serious, though insects rarely kill a shrub.

Dogwoods are susceptible to a variety of fungal problems, including leaf and twig blights, canker, and leaf spots.2 Fungal-diseased branches should be cut back to healthy wood; otherwise, the problem may spread to infect the entire shrub.

FAQ

* **Is red twig dogwood easy to care for?**

This shrub is easy to care for and requires only minimal pruning.

* **What birds are attracted to red twig dogwood?**

This shrub forms thickets that are favored by breeding birds, like the [American goldfinch](https://www.thespruce.com/american-goldfinch-identification-385975). But many other birds like red twig dogwood, such as robins, brown thrashers, [eastern bluebirds](https://www.thespruce.com/how-to-attract-bluebirds-386244), gray catbirds, [cardinals](https://www.thespruce.com/northern-cardinal-profile-387268), northern flickers, mockingbirds, and purple finches.

* **What should red twig dogwood be planted alongside?**

Use them in combination with [yellow twig dogwoods](https://www.thespruce.com/yellow-twig-dogwood-shrubs-2132735) for a stunning winter display. With or without their yellow cousins, red twig dogwoods look best when massed together.