

## Kousa Dogwood, *Cornus kousa*

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### Summary

**Foliage:** About 3 inches long; opposite; deciduous

**Height:** About 20 feet

**Spread:** About 20 feet

**Shape:** Round with distinct horizontal branch pattern

### Main Features

Kousa dogwood is a small tree with very showy flowers (bracts) in May/June. The true flower is relatively inconspicuous and sits in the center of four showy white bracts (tapered modified leaves, each about 1 to 2 inches long). Bracts are relatively long lived and persist for up to six weeks; in comparison, the flowering period for the native flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) is about two weeks. The branches of a mature tree generally have a distinct horizontal orientation. Thus, in flower, branch tiers are cloaked in white. In contrast to the native flowering dogwood, kousa dogwood produces its flowers after leaves have emerged. However, the bracts are held upright on a stalk (pedicle) and are not hidden by the foliage. The true flowers develop into spherical red-pink fruit (about 1 inch diameter; late summer/early fall) that are relatively showy. Fruit are edible when they become soft. Fall color varies from tree to tree (seedling-grown trees) and from cultivar to cultivar. There are numerous cultivars (more than 100) that vary in their flowering, fruit, and foliage characteristics. Bract characteristics include large size (bract cluster up to 6 inches in diameter), color (white, pink, and pink-red), and long lasting bracts. Foliage characteristics include variegation (green and white/cream, green and yellow), an evergreen nature, and a fair to good fall foliage color. Kousa dogwood is somewhat drought tolerant. The bark on some plants can be quite attractive and almost rival that of Japanese Stewartia (*Stewartia pseudocamellia*). If showy, bark can be mottled or a patchwork of orange-browns, olive green, tan and bronze colors. Unfortunately, desirable cultivars traits (mainly bracts and foliage) have not included bark characteristics. Collectively, bark, tree form, bracts, fruit, and foliage characteristics make this a species that is attractive throughout the year and can certainly be used as a specimen plant (plant with sufficient attributes to be featured as a focal point).

### Plant Needs

**Zone:** 5 to 8

**Light:** Full sun (part shade)

**Moisture:** Average to somewhat dry

**Soil type:** Average

**pH range:** Acid

## Functions

Kousa dogwood serves as a small flowering tree and can be used as a specimen plant (see last sentence of Main features section). It will become wide (up to 20 feet), thus proper placement is an important consideration. As with other small flowering trees, the flower show is much more dramatic if trees are placed in front of a dark background such a row of conifers.

## Care

Kousa dogwood requires relatively very little care and has very few notable pest problems. Fruit drop may pose a minor maintenance issue.

## Additional Information

In addition to the numerous kousa dogwood cultivars in the trade, there are also cultivars of hybrids between the native flowering dogwood (*C. florida*) and kousa dogwood. The rationale for crossing these two species was to produce hybrids that were vigorous, borer-resistant, and with pink-colored bracts. These hybrids, known as the Rutger hybrids (*Cornus ×rutgerensis*), were developed about the same time that the lethal form of anthracnose disease (*Discula*) was ravaging native and landscape populations of the native flowering dogwood. By chance, these hybrids were resistant to *Discula* and became relatively popular in the trade. Aurora®, Celestial™, and Constellation® are highly ranked by Dr. Michael Dirr in the *Manual of Woody Landscape Plants*.