



# Trowel Talk!

February, 2014

## Native dogwoods delight

We've all heard the reasons why growing native plants makes sense – low maintenance, drought tolerance, wildlife habitat, bio-diversity, and so on. But one very good reason, which is sometimes overlooked, is that they are very attractive plants.

One such native plant is the *Cornus* or dogwood genus. There are about 45 species of these deciduous trees or small shrubs worldwide. A number of them are native to Eastern Ontario.



*Cornus alternifolia* forms a small tree with attractive flowers which form fruit that the birds will enjoy

*C. alternifolia* grows in moist, shady areas throughout our region, reaching heights of up to 6m. Its tiered

branch structure is quite attractive and is the reason for its common name of pagoda dogwood. *C. alternifolia* is mostly grown as a small tree although it can also be grown as a multi-stemmed shrub. It offers spring interest as the leaves emerge tinged in red and then turn green. Summer brings a flush of small white flowers borne in clusters of 5cm across. The leaves turn red in the fall and birds feed on its blue-black berries as they mature. This is truly a welcome addition to the landscape in all seasons.



*Cornus sericea* in winter showing its bright red bark

*C. sericea* (syn. *C. stolonifera*) is the red osier dogwood that stands out so brightly against our blanket of snow. Its red branches are often used in floral arrangements. This is a vigorous, suckering shrub that will benefit from a severe pruning in early spring. Cut all the shoots right to the ground to encourage new growth. It is this new growth that will offer the brightest display of red the following winter. This shrub also provides a floral display in late spring to early summer. White flowers are followed by white berries that are sometimes tinged with blue. There are a number of cultivated varieties of *C. sericea* that offer a variety of heights and depth of bark colour. *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea' has a bright yellow-green winter bark that contrasts nicely with the red form. Full sun enhanc-

es the bark colour, although the plant will tolerate light shade.



The low-growing *Cornus canadensis* in bloom

*C. canadensis* is a much shorter relative in this family (about 10cm). *C. canadensis* spreads through a rhizomatous root system, which accounts for one of its common names of creeping dogwood. This feature makes *C. canadensis* a good groundcover, especially for moist, shady areas with a soil pH of about 5. The leaves grow in whorls on a single stem and are an attractive green. The flowers that appear in late spring are actually small, green florets arranged in 1.5cm clusters, which are surrounded by 4 white bracts. These bracts are modified leaves, which resemble flower petals. The flowers are followed by fleshy, bright red, bunches of berries, which is why one of the common names for *C. canadensis* is bunchberry. It is also referred to as dwarf cornel.

So if you're planning to do some renovations to your landscape this spring, consider using some of these hardy natives. Not only will the environment thank you, but you'll also enjoy their display of beauty year-round.

Mary Ann Van Berlo  
Master Gardener

### Trowel Talk!

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## Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton

### Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

#### ONGOING:

**Telephone Help Line:** 613-236-0034

- Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

**E-mail Help Line:** [mgoc\\_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

#### CLINICS:

**March 20-23, 2014 – Ottawa Home & Garden Show** – Ernst & Young Centre, 4899 Uplands Drive, Ottawa – Visit us at our booth. We'll be there all weekend at this annual spring show, to answer your gardening questions.

#### SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

**10 Must Grow Culinary Herbs** – February 18– 6:30 pm

Fran Dennett, Master Gardener

Orleans Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 1705 Orleans Blvd, Ottawa

Hosted by the Ottawa Public Library (Registration required – [click here](#))

**Lawn Maintenance for the Traditional Lawn plus Some Alternatives** – February 20 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

City View United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by Nepean Horticultural Society (Guest fee \$4)

**Making Scents of your Garden** – February 25 – 7:30pm

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Tom Brown Arena, 141 Bayview Road, Ottawa

Hosted by Ottawa Horticultural Society (Guests no charge)

**Renovating an Older Garden** – February 27 – 7:30 pm

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Rockcliffe Park, Community Centre, 380 Springfield Road, Ottawa

Hosted by Rockcliffe Park Garden Club (Guest fee \$7)

**10 Metre Diet, Intro to Backyard Organic Food Production** – March 1 – 2:00pm

Tom Marcantonio, Master Gardener

Ron Kolbus Lakeside Centre, 102 Greenview Ave, Ottawa

Hosted by Seedy Saturday

**Native Plants for City Gardeners.** – March 8 – 1:30 pm

Josie Pazdzior, Master Gardener.

Westboro Masonic Hall, 430 Churchill Avenue at Byron, Ottawa

Hosted by the Ottawa Valley Rock Garden & Horticultural Society (Guests no charge)

**Whispers in the Wind - Ornamental Grasses** – March 10 – 7:30 pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

RCMP Camp Hall on Nicholl's Island Road, Manotick

Hosted by Manotick Horticultural Society (Guest fee \$5)

**Making Scents of your Garden** – March 11 – 7:30pm

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

Champlain Park Fieldhouse, 149 Cowley Ave, Ottawa

Hosted by Champlain Park Garden Club (Guest fee: \$5)

**Whispers in the Wind - Ornamental Grasses** – March 11 – 7:30pm

Edythe Falconer, Master Gardener

Old Firehall, 260 Sunnyside Avenue, Ottawa

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (Guest fee \$7)

**10 Metre Diet, Intro to Backyard Organic Food Production** – March 17 – 6:30pm

Carlingwood Branch, Ottawa Public Library, 281 Woodroffe Ave, Ottawa

Tom Marcantonio, Master Gardener

Hosted by Ottawa Public Library (Registration required – link not active yet)



For information on arranging a lecture for your group: [speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca](mailto:speakers@mgottawa.mgoi.ca)

For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.mgoi.ca>

### February TO DO List

- Leeks, onions and parsley can be started from seed now. These plants take a long time to reach maturity and will benefit from sowing early indoors and growing under lights.
- Check bulbs & tubers that are in cold storage for signs of rot OR if you've used peat moss to store them, check the moisture level of the peat moss and if it is too dry, add a bit of water to moisten it slightly.
- Keep an eye on houseplants for signs of pests. Don't overwater indoor plants as they are semi-dormant now; increase watering when their spring growth begins.
- If you have a gardening or plant identification question, ask a Master Gardener (contact information to the right).

### Tip of the Month

Get ready for spring by rejuvenating old planters. A coat of spray paint can turn an old resin pot into a coordinated garden accessory. Make sure to use an exterior paint rated for use on plastic.

