



Appreciation of Dogwoods

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Photos by Connie Roberts

I recently moved from a small town in central Missouri to the oak and hickory woods of the Ozarks. I had one single lovely dogwood tree near my house in town. We had transplanted it from a creek bed on a friend's farm. I knew little about dogwoods, only that wild dogwood trees were open and wide-branching and hybridized dogwoods were tightly branched and sometimes had pink blossoms. I was fond of that one wild dogwood near my house but thrilled to find an uncountable abundance of



dogwoods showing their reds of autumn and then blooming so stately the first spring after we moved into the oak and hickory woods.

Wandering through the woods, I came to admire the dogwoods' resilience. Slender dogwoods reach tall to form the understory forest. Shoots grow out of a dying tree, stretching to twist

among her lifeless branches. After Hurricane Ike rained 5" on us in September of 2008, a slender 20' dogwood near our home was laid over. Amazingly, only half of its roots were underground, and yet it bloomed in 2009 and has buds again this year. I admire this courage in dogwoods—to keep on growing no matter how difficult the circumstances.

I also came to appreciate the variety of dogwoods. I had naively thought the shrubby dogwoods found throughout the woods were young versions of the flowering dogwood tree. But I noticed their leaves were not quite the same and they seemed to bear no large white spring flowers. I investigated dogwoods in *Trees of Missouri* by Stan Tekiela and in *Shrubs and Woody Vines of Missouri* by Don Kurz. I found that the Eastern Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) is Missouri's State Tree. I

found the shrubby dogwoods to be Rough-leaved Dogwoods (*Cornus drummondii*) or Grey Dogwoods (*Cornus racemosa*). Both are wide spread across Missouri and both have clusters of tiny flowers and small white berries, not the 4-white modified leaves (bracts) nor the red berries of flowering dogwood trees.

A recent awareness of dogwoods came when a sawmill owner delivered mulch. He looked across our ravine and noted that he had helped log that area 20 years ago. "I bet you have plenty of dogwoods," he said. "Dogwoods are the first trees to grow back after an area has been logged." I investigated this with Mike Fiaoni, Resource Forester in Dent County. Mr. Fiaoni said he had not heard this story before, but he stated that dogwoods need sunlight to bloom fully and it is likely that logging opens up the woods so that already established dogwoods bloom in greater profusion. I believe Mr. Fiaoni is correct because



the large quantity and variety of dogwoods could not have developed in the relatively short time since our area was logged. The truth must be that the partial clearing of the woods allowed existing dogwoods to flourish.

As long as I continue to live in the oak and hickory woods, I will continue to deepen my appreciation of the understory trees and shrubs—dogwoods. They are simply lovely.