

Cherokee Ethnobiology

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Ka na si ta



FLOWERING DOGWOOD

Cherokee Usage

The Dogwood Tree has been used by Cherokees for many generations. Dogwood leaves have been used for treatments of skin infections and rashes due to certain antiseptic and disinfectant properties. Bark of the Dogwood can be used in making a “tea” to alleviate anxiety and mild depression (conversely, this same drink is also consumed during stomp dances to keep dancers alert throughout the night). Other uses include forming the twigs into toothbrush substitutes (“dawgsticks”), the wood into tool handles, and the branches into arrow shafts. An ancient Cherokee tale relates the story of a felled warrior. Lying wounded with the enemy rapidly closing in, he told his fellow warriors to leave him to die so they could escape safely and protect their distant village. After blacking out, the warrior regained consciousness and found himself in a cave with his wounds covered with leaves of dogwood and elderberry. The Warrior realized that he had been brought to the cave by the Little People (ᎠᎺᎠᎺ ᎠᎺᎠᎺ Yunwi Tsunsi). The Little People nursed him back to health using a tea made of the same leaves. When the warrior healed, the Little People took him back to his village. The warrior thanked them. Upon turning back for one last glimpse of his helpers, all the warrior saw were deer running and jumping back through the woods.

Description

A small tree, growing to 25 feet in height and up to 8” in diameter. It has fist-sized, tear drop-shaped, simple leaves arranged in an opposite pattern. Conversely, the famous 3”, white flowers have always been counted upon as a harbinger of the coming Spring.

Where found:	The Dogwood is an understory tree found throughout the Ozarks in a variety of settings (though almost always shaded out by the larger oaks/hickories).
Other names:	Dogwood
Taxonomy:	Kingdom - Plantae Phylum - Magnoliophyta Class - Magnoliopsida Order – Cornales Family – Cornaceae Genus – <i>Cornus</i> Species – <i>florida</i>

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