

How to Plant a Flowering Dogwood From Seedlings



A stunner for spring and fall, flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) features showy flower display in early spring and bright red leaves and berries in fall. Grown in U.S. Department of Agriculture plant hardiness zones 5 through 9, this small to medium tree works well as a single specimen tree or when planted in groups. Its flowers are actually small, nearly unnoticeable flowers surrounded by four large white or pink bracts. Dogwoods are most often propagated by cuttings or grafting cultivars, but you can dig up a volunteer seedling or plant a nursery seedling in your garden.

Remove any grass or weeds in a 5-by-5-foot square area in a site that receives partial shade, between four and six hours of sunlight daily. Turn the soil to a depth of about 12 inches, using a rototiller or garden hoe. The tilled, loose soil allows the shallow roots to grow horizontally and establish quickly.

Blend up to 50 percent organic matter with the native soil if you have poor soil with poor drainage. Materials such as compost, manure, leaf mold and grass clippings help build soil tilth, add nutrients and improve drainage.

Dig a hole in the soil that is 12 inches deep and 36 inches wide or the same depth and three times the width of the root ball if planting a seedling from a nursery container.

Dig up a volunteer dogwood seedling with a spade shovel. Dig a 12-inch diameter, 12-inch deep circle around the base of the seedling. Remove the dogwood from the hole and place it in a bucket or on a tarp to move it to the new planting site. The hole you previously prepared is the same depth, but three times the width of the root ball. Young seedlings' root systems shouldn't be this large, but a large root ball reduces transplant shock.

Set the flowering dogwood seedling in the hole with the top of the root ball even with the surrounding soil grade. Adjust the trunk of the tree so that it is vertical and will grow as straight as possible. Scoop loose soil around the seedling root ball to back-fill the hole. Slightly pack the soil around the root ball with your hands to remove air pockets.

Pour water onto the soil around the base of the tree to moisten the soil -- the soil should be moist but not wet. Water the young seedling once or twice weekly during the first year after planting to retain soil moisture. Avoid over-watering young trees because this may lead to poor root development or root rot.

Spread a 3 to 4-inch layer of shredded bark mulch around the base of the tree to retain soil temperature and moisture. Keep an area 2 inches out from the trunk free of mulch to prevent root rot and infestation.

Drive four 3-foot wooden stakes spaced evenly around the trunk. Position the stakes about 12 inches out from the trunk and drive them 12 inches deep, leaving 2 feet protruding above ground. Wrap chicken wire or similar wire mesh fencing around the stakes and use wood staples, wire or zip ties to secure the mesh to the stakes. This wire mesh cage protects the tree from hungry animals so it can survive and grow into a sapling and later, a tree.

Apply a water-soluble, all-purpose fertilizer, such as 10-10-10, one month after planting in spring and again in fall. Mix the fertilizer at a rate of 1 tablespoon to 1 gallon of water and apply it as part of the regular watering schedule.

Things You Will Need

- Rototiller
- Garden hoe
- Organic matter
- Shovel
- Spade
- Shredded bark mulch
- 4 3-foot wooden stakes
- Rubber mallet
- Chicken wire
- Wood staples, wire or zip ties
- All-purpose fertilizer

Warning

- Only transplant volunteer dogwood seedlings grown from the seeds of a disease-free dogwood tree. Dogwoods grown in the wild can carry the *Discula destructiva* fungus, which causes dogwood anthracnose, and pests such as borers. Dogwood anthracnose exhibits itself as black or brown spots on the leaves.