



Bucks Country Gardens

Growing And Maintaining Healthy Dogwoods

Although they are most spectacular in spring, dogwoods are beautiful year round. They are truly a four-season plant, displaying lustrous green leaves in summer; deep red leaves in autumn and bright red clusters of seeds during the winter months.

PLANTING SITE

Where you plant your tree is crucial to the health of the plant. When planted in poorly drained areas, dogwoods do not grow well and may even die. When exposed to full sun, leaves often become scorched. Good planting sites should have at least partial shade and good drainage.

Preparing the planting site properly is extremely important. If this is not done at the outset, poor growth will result. Dig a hole at least 18 inches deep and 3 feet in diameter, regardless of the tree size. Current research has shown that the addition of soil amendments is not necessary. In most cases, the soil removed from the planting hole is sufficient for good tree growth.

It is very easy to plant trees too deeply. Leave 1"-2" of root ball exposed to avoid this problem.

MAINTENANCE

Watering, fertilizing, pruning and mulching are vital components of a good maintenance program. In the absence of regular rainfall, dogwoods will need supplemental water during the summer and fall. Water once a week, in the morning with a soaker hose and soak the soil to a depth of 6 inches. Watering with a sprinkler is not recommended because it wets the foliage, creating ideal conditions for certain diseases.

Broadcast fertilize on top of soil in late spring or early summer after leaves complete expansion. Water area after fertilization.

Regular pruning serves many purposes. Removing dead and diseased branches helps prevent the spread of disease and insects. Pruning improves the tree's structure as well as its appearance. Winter is an excellent time to prune your tree.

All pruning cuts should be made with a clean, sharp tool and should be properly positioned and made in the proper order. First, locate the tree limb's branch collar (see drawing). Follow the steps shown for proper pruning cuts.

Mulching is one of the easiest and most protective things you can do for trees. Mulch is used for appearance, weed control, water conservation, erosion control and improvement of soil structure. Mulch also insulates roots from cold and heat. Apply mulch 4 to 6 inches deep underneath the limb spread for best results.