

Dogwoods and Willows for Winter Stem Colour®

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INTRODUCTION

In recent years in the U.K. there has been an increasing interest in winter gardening. Various gardens and arboreta have constructed and developed areas for winter interest to attract visitors and so improve their cash flow. Articles have also appeared in gardening magazines, extolling the virtues of winter gardens. Besides the use of winter flowering shrubs and bulbs, plants with winter stem/bark colour can create wonderful effects with the low winter sun shining through them. The annual coppicing of certain dogwoods and willows can create this effect. This paper aims to evaluate the best selections to use.

THE DOGWOODS

Cornus alba. One of the most effective plants for winter stem colour is *Cornus alba* 'Sibirica', a form with brilliant crimson shoots which has more rounded leaves than the species. *Cornus alba* 'Kesselringii', is very striking with almost black-purple stems and looks excellent underplanted with snowdrops. *Cornus alba* 'Aurea' has dark red shoots and during the summer the advantage of foliage suffused a soft yellow. The variegated forms of *Cornus alba* also have dark red shoots but have a tendency to revert when hard pruned each year.

***Cornus sericea* (syn. *C. stolonifera*)**. *Cornus sericea* 'Cardinal' is a form selected by the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum. The shoots are salmon pink at the base changing to cherry red from about half way up. *Cornus sericea* 'Flaviramea' is the well known yellow-barked dogwood. It is variable in the trade, some forms being a greenish yellow, while others are a brighter yellow. This cultivar makes an excellent contrast to the dogwoods with red or darker stems. *Cornus sericea* 'Bud's Yellow', from personal observations, is identical to *C. sericea* 'Flaviramea'. In North America it is said to be more resistant to canker. *Cornus sericea* 'Isanti' is another Minnesota Landscape Arboretum introduction, more compact than 'Cardinal' with a darker red stem colour.

Cornus sanguinea. Native to Europe, this species is not particularly attractive for coppicing, with shoots green at the base to dark reddish purple up the main part of the stem. However some interesting bright-stem-coloured variants have arisen which are in this author's opinion some of the finest plants for winter stem colour.

Cornus sanguinea 'Beteramsii' has yellow shoots, flushed with orange-red. It was raised before 1940 at Beterams nursery in Germany but it is amazing that this plant is still virtually unknown after more than 60 years. *C. sanguinea* 'Winter Beauty', arose as a chance seedling in a bed of *C. sanguinea* seedlings on a nursery in Zundert, Holland. Selected and introduced by Andre van Nijnatten in 1987, who also has a nursery in Zundert, Holland. *Cornus sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire' was also introduced about this time by the young plant producer in Boskoop, Holland, van den Dool. This cultivar has been produced in large numbers by the nursery and is the cultivar most commonly met with in the trade. These two cultivars are very similar to each other and *C. sanguinea* 'Beteramsii'.

Andre van Nijnatten, however, sowed seeds of 'Winter Beauty' and has raised and named several cultivars, three of which are outstanding: *C. sanguinea* 'Annys Winter Orange' is a vigorous form with bright orange red stems; *C. sanguinea* 'Magic Flame' is similar to 'Winter Beauty' but more vigorous and the stems are much brighter, yellow at the base grading quickly to orange-red for most of the shoot; *C. sanguinea* 'Winter Flame' is a form with bright yellow shoots for about half to two-thirds of the stem, then changing to bright red. These three cultivars raised and selected by Andre van Nijnatten are far superior to 'Winter Beauty' and 'Midwinter Fire' and should be taken up by the nursery industry.

Other Species. *Cornus* 'Bloodgood' is thinner stemmed and narrower of leaf than *C. alba* and *C. sericea*, and has dark blood-red stems. *Cornus amomum* 'Blue Cloud' is a striking form getting its name from the attractive metallic-blue fruits. The winter stem colour is dark reddish purple. *Cornus hemsleyi* is a vigorous shrub with reddish shoots should be tried more often.

THE WILLOWS

***Salix alba*.** Several different clones of the yellow stemmed *S. alba* subsp. *vitellina* are in the trade, when you see these alongside each other it becomes obvious that many of them are not worthy of cultivation. The best form is *S. alba* 'Golden Ness', the shining egg yolk yellow shoots are very conspicuous. Likewise there are several forms of *S. alba* subsp. *vitellina* 'Britzensis' but the best clone in this author's opinion is *S. alba* 'Yelverton' with shining, brilliant, orange-scarlet stems.

***Salix xrubens*.** A hybrid between *S. alba* and *S. fragilis*, there are two good forms for stem colour, firstly *S. xrubens* 'Basfordiana' with orange-red stems and *S. xrubens* 'Sanguinea', smaller leaved and with redder stems.

***Salix xsepulcralis* 'Erythroflexuosa'.** A form with curious, twisted and contorted stems which are orange-yellow in colour, enhanced by annual pruning.

Willows with Bluish-purple Stems. *Salix acutifolia* 'Blue Streak' with polished, blackish purple stems covered with a blue-white bloom will produce attractive male catkins on 1-year-old shoots. *Salix irrorata* has purple shoots, covered with a striking white bloom, a very attractive plant and the best in this group.