



“Prune like a Pro!” 2021

Kousa Dogwood *(Cornus kousa)*

TITLE: **Cornaceae is the Dogwood family** and includes the native *Cornus florida* as well as the Kousa Dogwood (*Cornus kousa*) which is not native to North America.

Description: *Cornus kousa* is a striking specimen tree, flowering later than the *Cornus florida* and differing in having pointed bracts. For best flowering, plant *Cornus Kousa* in full sun. Quite resistant to anthracnose. Needs watering during severe droughts

Objective(s): Learn how to prune *Cornus kousa* to maintain its natural shape.

WHAT: Kousa Dogwood grows 15 to 20 feet tall and has beautiful exfoliating bark, long lasting flowers, good fall color, and attractive fruit. Branches grow upright when the tree is young, but appear in horizontal layers on mature trees. (This is important to keep in mind when pruning.) On many specimens, the crown eventually grows wider than it is tall.

WHY: Kousa Dogwood can be grown with multiple trunks or pruned early to have a single trunk. The branches tend to droop as the tree grows, and may require pruning for vehicular or pedestrian clearance beneath the canopy.

WHEN: Removal of the 4 D’s (dead, diseased, damaged, dysfunctional) can be done at any time of year. Pruning for shape should be done after the tree has finished flowering. Kousa dogwood blooms in late spring -- after the native dogwoods have bloomed.

WHERE: *Cornus Kousa* does best planted in full sun, and will tolerate part shade. (Native dogwoods are understory trees, and do not do well in full sun).

HOW: Kousa dogwood needs only light pruning to remain healthy. Some professionals suggest pruning no more than 10%, as they tend to produce multiple water sprouts.

- Cut out any dead, cracked, abrading or otherwise damaged branches. Place the cut back to a point of healthy wood or back down to the parent branch from which the problem branch originates. (the 4 D’s do not count against the 10% pruning budget)
- Place all cuts on the bias just 1/4 inch above a leaf node or bud or just outside of the slightly swollen branch collar where two branches meet.
- Thin the interior of the canopy (if needed) to increase sunlight and fresh air flow. Prune away branches that grow inward toward the trunk.
- Spread the thinning cuts throughout the canopy evenly to preserve a balanced shape.
- Reduce the length of the branches only when needed to improve access around the tree, such as when it overhangs a walkway or is brushing up against another tree canopy or structure.
- Snip off branches on the lower third of the remaining trunk with pruners or loppers and the tree will grow taller, faster.

SUMMARY OF IMPORTANT POINTS:

- Kousa dogwoods should be lightly pruned. Remove no more than 10%.
- Prune for shape, not for size. Topping will simply produce a lot of ugly water sprouts!
- Decide early on if you want a single trunk or multiple trunks. This is a shaping decision.
- Focus on pruning the 4 D's (dead, diseased, damaged, dysfunctional).
- Make a few thinning cuts, if necessary, to improve sunlight and air circulation.
- Remove branches on the lower third of the trunk as the tree grows.



Pruning a Kousa dogwood, over time, from a multi-trunk to single trunk

Additional Resources / References:

“Cornus Kousa: Kousa Dogwood” University of Florida and US Forest Service Fact Sheet ST-191,
http://hort.ufl.edu/database/documents/pdf/tree_fact_sheets/corkoua.pdf

“Pruning Tips: Pruning Dogwoods”, Plant Amnesty Newsletter,
<https://www.plantamnesty.org/wp-content/uploads/Dogwood-Trees.pdf>

“Pruning Kousa”, <https://homeguides.sfgate.com/pruning-kousa-29826.html>

“How to Prune Kousa Dogwood Trees”, [How to Prune Kousa Dogwood Trees \(gardenguides.com\)](http://www.gardenguides.com/How-to-Prune-Kousa-Dogwood-Trees/)

Knox County Master Gardeners website: www.knoxcountymastergardener.org

Knox County Master Gardeners Facebook page: <https://www.facebook.com/KnoxCountyMG>

Ask-a-Master Gardener / Knox County Extension Helpline: (865) 215-2340

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