

# Why Won't My Dogwood Trees Bloom, Are They Sterile?

**Dear Plant Doctor:** I am writing to inquire about the flowering of dogwood trees.

In the fall of 1988, I planted ten dogwood trees in the woods surrounding our home. There are pre-existing dogwood trees which bloom each year. Unfortunately, the trees planted six years ago have never bloomed. During that time the trees have grown, they display healthy foliage, and are shaded enough by the surrounding pine trees that I have never noticed any sunburn to the leaves.

My questions are, does the lack of blooms indicate sterile trees? And if this is not possible, do these trees require a nutrient to stimulate bloom (a nutrient which must not be required by the pre-existing dogwoods which never fail to bloom?)

I will be looking forward to your reply. —Laurinburg

**Answer:** The Eastern Flowering Dogwood (*Cornus florida*) may fail to bloom for a multitude of reasons. I am sure "sterile" dogwood trees occur in nature, but it is a dead-end path and I expect it is extremely rare. I doubt that you have planted 6 sterile dogwoods. I have no idea why your dogwoods have not bloomed, but a number of factors influence dogwood bloom...maybe you will recognize the cause of your problem in the following information.

Transplanted seedling dogwoods normally flower 2 to 5 years after planting. However many cultural practices, environmental conditions, and other factors can influence the normal flowering of dogwood.

Dogwoods set bloom in August and September in eastern North Carolina in response to shorter day length. During this time plants are especially sensitive to environmental disturbances. I suspect excessive fertilizer, drought, insect infestation, disease or even exposure to night lighting can adversely affect the bloom during this time. Excessively cold winter temperatures routinely freeze dogwood buds in the midwest but I doubt that impacts you in Laurinburg.

I suspect your trees will eventually bloom. You may want to take a soil test around the root zone of your trees to check for the nutrient status of the existing soil. Phosphorus (eg. bonemeal or 0-20-0) will often stimulate flowering in plants having a difficult time with their floral display. I am sending you an excellent Southern Forest Service pamphlet titled "Growing and Maintaining Healthy Dogwoods-FR 14" to help solve your blooming problem.

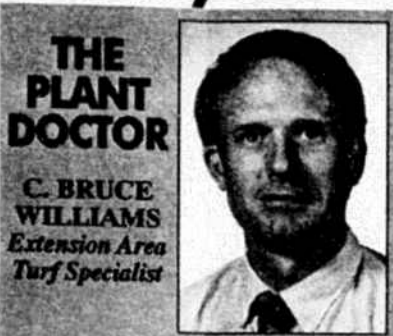
## 10 Steps To Maintaining Healthy Dogwoods

1. Select healthy trees to plant.
2. Purchase trees from a reputable nursery—do not transplant trees from the wild.
3. Select good planting sites to promote rapid foliage drying.
4. Use proper planting technique.
5. Prune and destroy dead wood and leaves yearly; prune trunk sprouts in the fall.
6. Water weekly in the morning during drought, but do not wet foliage.
7. Maintain a 4- to 6-inch-deep mulch around trees; do not use dogwood chips for mulch.
8. Fertilize according to N.C. Department of Agriculture soil analysis.
9. Use appropriate pesticides when appropriate. (Check with your N.C. Cooperative Extension Service for specific recommendations!)
10. Avoid mechanical and chemical injury to trees.

**Dear Plant Doctor:** It certainly would be nice to have you for a neighbor where I could just stick my head over the fence and ask you all these questions.

The question I have today is whether you have heard about "Spray-n-Grow" (see enclosed advertisement). This supposedly a bio-catalyst and not a fertilizer. Does it work or will I be wasting my money?

Hoping to hear from you with usual informative and quick answer. —Fayetteville



**THE PLANT DOCTOR**  
C. BRUCE WILLIAMS  
Extension Area  
Turf Specialist

information about this product. However, I did call Dr. Art Nightingale (Professor Emeritus, Horticulture Department, Texas A&M) and discussed at length his results with Spray-N-Grow. Dr. Nightingale told me the product has indeed produced amazing results in his replicated field trials but he did not know why.

Evidently this product contains trace elements and enzymes (?) that increase fruit size and fruit set. Reportedly, research is currently being conducted at Cornell University and several other colleges to confirm the beneficial effects of this

product. For additional information about the product, contact Bill Muskopf, P.O. Box 2137, Rockport, Texas 78382, (512)790-9033.

Try Spray-N-Grow at your own risk and let me know what you

Spray-N-Grow may be an excellent product; time will tell. However, as a scientist and professional skeptic, I am extremely leery of any product that does not include a detailed list of contents.

Prolific use of home gardener testimonials (without any accompanying scientific references or university evaluations) is another warning

flag for some unscrupulous products. These products seem to work best when soil fertility, cultural practices and pest control are optimum. Sound familiar?

Products offered to gardeners often do not have the same quality guarantees as many other consumer goods. Nearly any unethical entrepreneur can bottle pond water, add some trace elements and claim miraculous gardening successes. Multiple site-replicated scientific field evaluations are required of legitimate agricultural fertilizer amendments, equipment and pesticides.

The greatest gardening successes I routinely witness is when gardeners conduct annual soil tests, follow N.C. State-recommended cultural practices, and follow recommended integrated pest management strategies.

Send your questions and comments to the Plant Doctor, P.O. Box 109, Bolivia NC 28422.

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