Cornus officinalis **Sieb. & Zucc.**

Cornaceae
Source of: shān zhū yú 山茱萸
Asian dogwood fruit

Summary Description

This woody shrub or small tree, 12-40 feet tall, grows in full sun to part shade and is hardy to Zone 5 at least. The Latin word *officinalis* indicates the plant has been recognized as medicinal for a very long time. Many of the Asian species have been prized throughout history for their hard cornel-wood. This dogwood is highly ornamental with grayish brown, exfoliating bark and terminal, umbel-like yellow flowers in March or April prior to leaf emergence. The smooth, ovate leaves to 4 inches long have prominent veins. The oblong red to red-purple drupes (to ¾ inch long) ripen in September to October. The fruit pulp is edible but sour.

Propagation

Soak the hard seeds in hot water 24 hours. Fresh seed, if planted into containers in autumn and kept moist at 40°F over the winter, will begin to germinate the following spring. Older seed needs a period of warm stratification (up to 6 months) followed by a shorter cold period. Germination will be sporadic over a year or more; do not discard containers prematurely. Transplant seedlings into individual treepots, increase the container size gradually until the root mass fills a one gallon treepot.

Cultivation

The tree could be used in a mixed orchard of small trees, or at forest margins, sunlit openings or on slopes. Especially where hardiness is in question, do not plant out until the roots have filled out a one-gallon pot. Plant in early spring, protect small trunks from deer. May be pruned to influence the shape. Begins to bear fruit about 10 years after planting.

Harvest & Processing

The collected drupes are soaked and tumbled to remove the pits (seeds). The fruit pulp is dried at low temperatures with techniques similar to those used for dried cherries or other stone fruits.

References

Flora of China: http://www.efloras.org/florataxon.aspx?flora_id=2&taxon_id=200016000
Bensky *Materia Medica* page: 855

Analog species

The North American dogwoods such as *Cornus florida,* the low-growing *C. canadensis,* and even the Asian species *C. kousa* commonly used as an ornamental shrub, bear red drupes but they are distinctly different in texture and flavor from shān zhū yú.

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