



United States Department of Agriculture

# 'Ruby' red osier dogwood *Cornus sericea ssp. sericea* L.

A Conservation Plant Release by USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center, Corning, New York



'Ruby' red osier dogwood in full bloom. Photo taken at the USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center.

'Ruby' red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea ssp. sericea* L.) is a cultivar released in 1988. It was released by the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Big Flats Plant Materials Center in cooperation with the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation.

### Description

Ruby is a low-growing shrub that can grow 6-10 feet in height. The growth habit is upright and rounded, but where its stems are in contact with the ground, roots emerge, forming a thicket. It has bright, red stems with a white pith, dark green ovate leaves, white flowers, and whitish colored fruit.

### Source

Ruby was collected from a single native plant in Painted Post, New York, in 1975. It was evaluated alongside 42 other red osier dogwood accessions from the Northeast, United States. It was selected for its outstanding layering ability, bright red stems and bark throughout the year, and its uniform, rounded growth habit. A foundation cutting block was planted with rooted cuttings in 1983, and this block serves as the source for the cultivar.

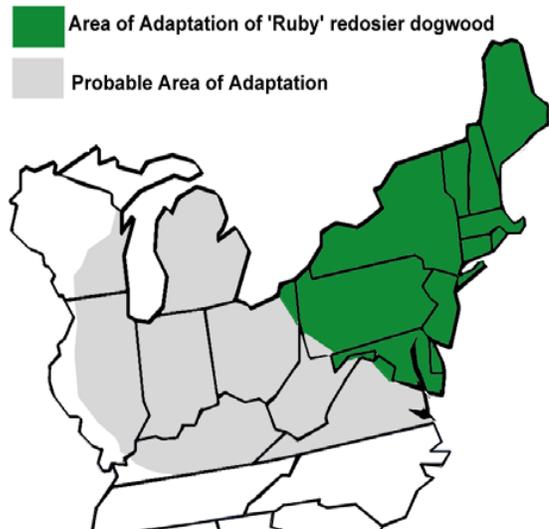
### Conservation Uses

Ruby is used for streambank stabilization because of the tendency of the side branches to root or "layer". This layering ability provides excellent soil erosion control, especially in soil bioengineering practices. In addition, it can be used for borders and as a single plant for beautification and landscaping. Twigs are readily browsed by deer and its fruit is eaten by many species of songbirds and upland game birds. Ruby also provides nesting cover for songbirds, escape cover for pheasants and rabbits. The

drooping branches into the stream provide cover for fish and keep the water cool.

### Area of Adaptation and Use

Ruby is adapted from Ohio to Maine and south to northern Virginia and New Jersey. It performs best on soils that are moist, somewhat poorly drained, moderately acidic to neutral, and in areas that have medium to coarse textured soils. It is tolerant to some shade but not to severe drought conditions. It will also grow in medium fertility and clayey, loamy, or sandy soils.



Area of Adaptation and use of 'Ruby' red osier dogwood.

### Establishment and Management for Conservation Plantings

**Establishment:** Before planting Ruby, streambanks with steep slopes must be graded to 1 to 2% slope or flatter. It should be planted in the early spring using unrooted cuttings or 1-year old rooted cutting stock. Do not plant after June 1. Both rooted and unrooted cuttings should be planted in a vertical position and the soil tamped firmly around the roots, to eliminate air pockets. At the edge of water, a single or double row of Ruby is recommended at a spacing of 2 feet. It is susceptible to browsing by livestock and cannot be established unless protected by a fence.

Full length stems of Ruby can be combined with willow in live fascines, brush layers, or brush mattresses. See NRCS Engineering Handbook, Chapter 16, for bioengineering guidance. Grass and legume seed mixtures should be seeded immediately after planting 'Ruby', to provide initial streambank protection. 'Ruby' becomes

effective 2-3 years after planting. For help in planning streambank plantings, contact your local NRCS office or Soil and Water Conservation District.

**Management:** Protecting the waterline as damage takes place is necessary to prevent accelerated erosion. Streambanks should be examined each spring, and sparse plant cover should be filled in with the new plants.

Any mechanical measures used to control the bank, such as riprap, must be kept in repair to maintain effective vegetative cover. When used on streambanks, Ruby requires little care unless damaged by winter or ice flow.

In landscape plantings, it is helpful to prune Ruby to within 6 inches of the soil surface in March, every other year. This will cause re-growth of long young stems. Well established plants will grow 4-6 foot stems the summer after pruning.



*Photo taken at the USDA NRCS, Big Flats Plant Materials Center, showing the roots of 'Ruby'.*

### **Ecological Considerations**

Ruby has few problems with disease or insect pests. Lesions and cankers may occur; however, these are not pathogenic and are thought to be the tree's reaction to injury. Deer will browse on all parts of newly established plants of Ruby, so protection while the plants are still small is recommended.

### **Seed and Plant Production**

Ruby is propagated by vegetative methods. Hardwood cuttings, approximately 9 inches long, are made in mid-February or during their dormant period. They are held in a plant cooler until planted into nursery beds in mid-May.

Rooting hormones significantly improve its rooting ability. The plant is ready for shipping the following spring as 1-0 stock.

### **Availability**

*For conservation use:* Ruby is widely available in nurseries throughout the Northeast. For the names of commercial nurseries that sell 'Ruby' or for more information on its use, contact your local NRCS office or Soil and Water Conservation District.

*For seed or plant increase:* Nursery owners may obtain propagated material from the USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials Center, to start their cutting block for commercial production.

*For more information, contact:*  
USDA NRCS Big Flats Plant Materials  
Center  
3255 State Route 352  
Corning, New York 14830  
607-358-6009 (phone)  
Or  
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<http://plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/nypmc/>

### **Citation**

Release Brochure for 'Ruby' red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea ssp. sericea* L.) USDA-Natural Resources Conservation Service, Big Flats Plant Materials Center, Corning, New York 14830. Published [March 2015].

For additional information about this and other plants, please contact your local USDA Service Center, NRCS field office, or Conservation District <<http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/>>, and visit the PLANTS Web site <<http://plants.usda.gov/>> or the Plant Materials Program Web site <<http://www.plant-materials.nrcs.usda.gov/>>

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