

It's a Dogwood's Life
(A humorous look at what dogwood trees may tell us, if they could!)
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Hello, my name is *Cornus florida*, but you can call me 'Dogwood'. The County Extension Office is very busy at present. To help Willie out, I am writing his column for him!

Did you know I could write? I also talk! Unfortunately it is hard for my owner to understand me. We have a major communication problem. I cannot speak English and he cannot 'talk tree'. So I try to leave him hints about my condition and the things I need.

It is difficult for my owner to learn to 'talk tree.' For one thing, he always looks at my leaves to see how I am doing. This is a good idea, but I wish he knew that this may be the last place that I will show any problems. If a tree is sick, by the time a tree's leaves are affected it is may be too late to do anything. The things that are happening with my roots and stem are much more important than what is happening on my leaves.

For instance, he got upset because I have spots on my leaves. Those spots could be an indication of a disease, but I am a tree, not an annual flower. A healthy tree can withstand the loss of many leaves without severe injury. Unless I lose almost all my leaves, he can probably ignore the spots. If he will rake up and destroy my falling leaves he may prevent the spread of the disease. I am too big to spray for disease anyway. He could save himself a lot of worry and learn to live with the spots. I know I have.

I am redirecting his attention to my trunk and roots. See how the weed eater and lawnmower are damaging my trunk? My water and food transport system is right under the bark. When my bark is skinned off it is like I have a heart blockage!

My owner complained about my roots on top of the ground. He wants to cover them with soil or cut them off. This may smother or destroy most important part - my roots! It is better to cover my roots with a two to four inch thick mulch. I would really love this! This keeps my roots cooler and moister in the summer and prevents those pesky weeds from growing!

One reason roots grow on top of the ground is because of hard soils. Dogwoods and other trees do not grow as well where the soil is hard. When planting trees, dig a wide area to plant in - at least two to five times the width of the root ball. In hard soils, my roots have to grow on the top of the soil. It is the only place that is soft enough to grow my tender roots.

I am so glad that my owner knows how to water me in dry weather. I have it so much better than the dogwood in the neighbor's yard. The neighbor waters his tree every other day. I am glad that my owner understands that frequent, shallow watering weakens plants and can lead to our death.

Dogwoods and other trees and shrubs prefer to be watered with three quarters to one inch of

water when we dry out. This should generally be done about once every week during dry weather. Do not water again until the soil dries slightly. Infrequent deep watering makes my roots grow deep and strong. Healthy roots produce healthy trees.

I know a dogwood around the block that is in terrible shape. She is planted in full sun! She really needs some sunscreen! This sun is slowly killing her. Dogwoods are not designed for full sun locations. We prefer light shade. She would be delighted to be planted under some tall pines! Full sun, dry sites are great for a crape myrtle, but they are murder on us shade loving trees.

If you want to have a dogwood tree in the sun, plant one of my cousins – the Kousa dogwood. Kousa dogwoods bloom later and have more pointed leaves, but they make a great replacement for flowering dogwoods in the sun.

Perhaps my owner will read this article. Then he can begin to see things from my perspective. If I could speak to him now I would say, 'Treat dogwoods right and we will give you many years of trouble-free service!'