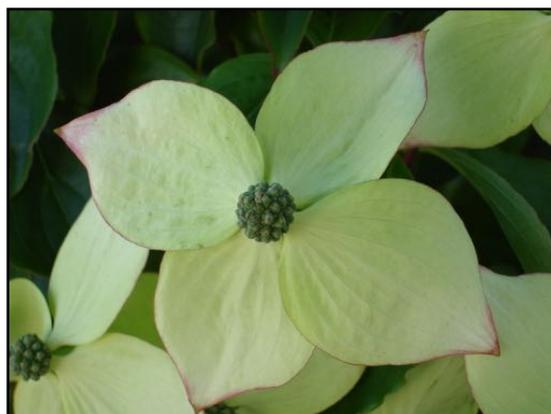


CORNUS KOUSA 'CHINA GIRL'

Nigel Needham

Cornus kousa var. chinensis was recommended as a very good garden subject by Andrew Humphris of Wollerton Old Hall, in his informative and entertaining talk on trees and shrubs at our Derbyshire Group meeting in December. His endorsement prompted me to write this article. Andrew said that the Chinese varieties of *C. kousa* were generally slightly hardier than their North American counterparts, and he particularly recommended the pink-flowered variety, *C. kousa* 'Miss Satomi', which looked absolutely gorgeous in his slide. However, my only specimen is the extremely popular variety *C. kousa* 'China Girl', which has creamy white 'flowers' (technically bracts, of course), in June.



All photographs © Nigel Needham

The flowers and bracts of *Cornus kousa* var. *chinensis* 'China Girl'

I deliberated about buying the plant because the natural habit of its mid-green, slightly pointed leaves appeared somewhat droopy to me, and not particularly appealing. However, the prospect of a specimen laden with bracts persuaded me to buy it, and I have now come to admire this leaf formation: it is a little different. The quantity of bracts has increased each year, and this summer gave a magnificent show which virtually hid the leaves below. Their colour changes to a deepening pink as time progresses, which is a lovely bonus.



***C. kousa* 'China Girl' in full autumn colour**

In late summer/autumn, small, strawberry-like, mid-to-deep red fruits appear. Andrew confirmed that they were edible but did not recommend eating them, a view I wholly endorse! However, they did prove very useful for our neighbours' children when they created a miniature garden in a seed tray. Another bonus is the autumn leaf colour, which is orange/red. The skeletal winter framework is pleasant but unremarkable.

My tree has proved totally hardy to date. Research shows it to be hardy to -15°C, though it may not be totally hardy in open or exposed sites or some central and northern locations. The bracts are said to be more profuse when the previous summer has been hot and dry. Ultimate height is 7m (22ft) with a spread of 5m (15ft). Mine has not yet reached these proportions, but has flourished so well that the head gardener lodged a formal complaint that the leaves overhung the garden path, necessitating a side-step and, in wet weather, resulting in wet clothing. A mandatory pruning followed, and I await the spring with anticipation to see if I have managed to root any cuttings from the lopped material. I hope that I have; I would love to be able to share this excellent plant with others.