

Technical Report



Wetland Flora

No. 97-3 / May 1997

Gene Silberhorn

Swamp Dogwood

Silky Dogwood

Cornus amomum Mill.

Growth Habit and Diagnostic Characteristics

Cornus amomum is a shrub ranging from 1 to 3 meters tall with simple, deciduous, opposite, smooth marginate leaves. The underside of the leaves have brownish hairs, especially along the veins. New branches are purplish with rust colored hairs, hence the common name, silky dogwood. Small (2 to 4 mm), white flowers are aggregated into a rather flat or hemispherical cyme, similar to elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis* (Wetlands Flora No. 95-3 / March 1995). The inflorescence of swamp dogwood is smaller (up to 8 cm) than elderberry (20 to 40 cm). Elderberry has opposite pinnately compound leaves, a feature that further differentiates the two shrub species. Silvery-blue fruits (drupes) develop near the end of the season. *C. amomum* differs from the more familiar flowering dogwood, *Cornus florida* in that it does not produce the characteristic large, showy white bracts or the bright red berries in the fall. Other wetland shrubs with conspicuous white flower heads are buttonbush, *Cephalanthus occidentalis* (Wetland Flora No. 94-10 / November 1994) which have characteristic globe-shaped flower heads and the sweet pepper bush, *Clethra alnifolia*, which has a terminal spike.

Distribution

C. amomum ranges from Quebec and Ontario, south to southern Illinois in the west to South Carolina and Alabama in the east.

Habitat

Silky dogwood is almost always found in freshwater wetlands, particularly scrub/shrub and forested wetlands. In swamps it is common along the margins, often co-occurring with alder, *Alnus serrulata* (Wetland Flora No. 95 - 5 / July 1995); elderberry, *Sambucus canadensis* (Wetland Flora No. 95-3 / March 1995), button bush, swamp rose, *Rosa palustris* (Wetland Flora No. 95 6 / September); and highbush blueberry, *Vaccinium corymbosum*.

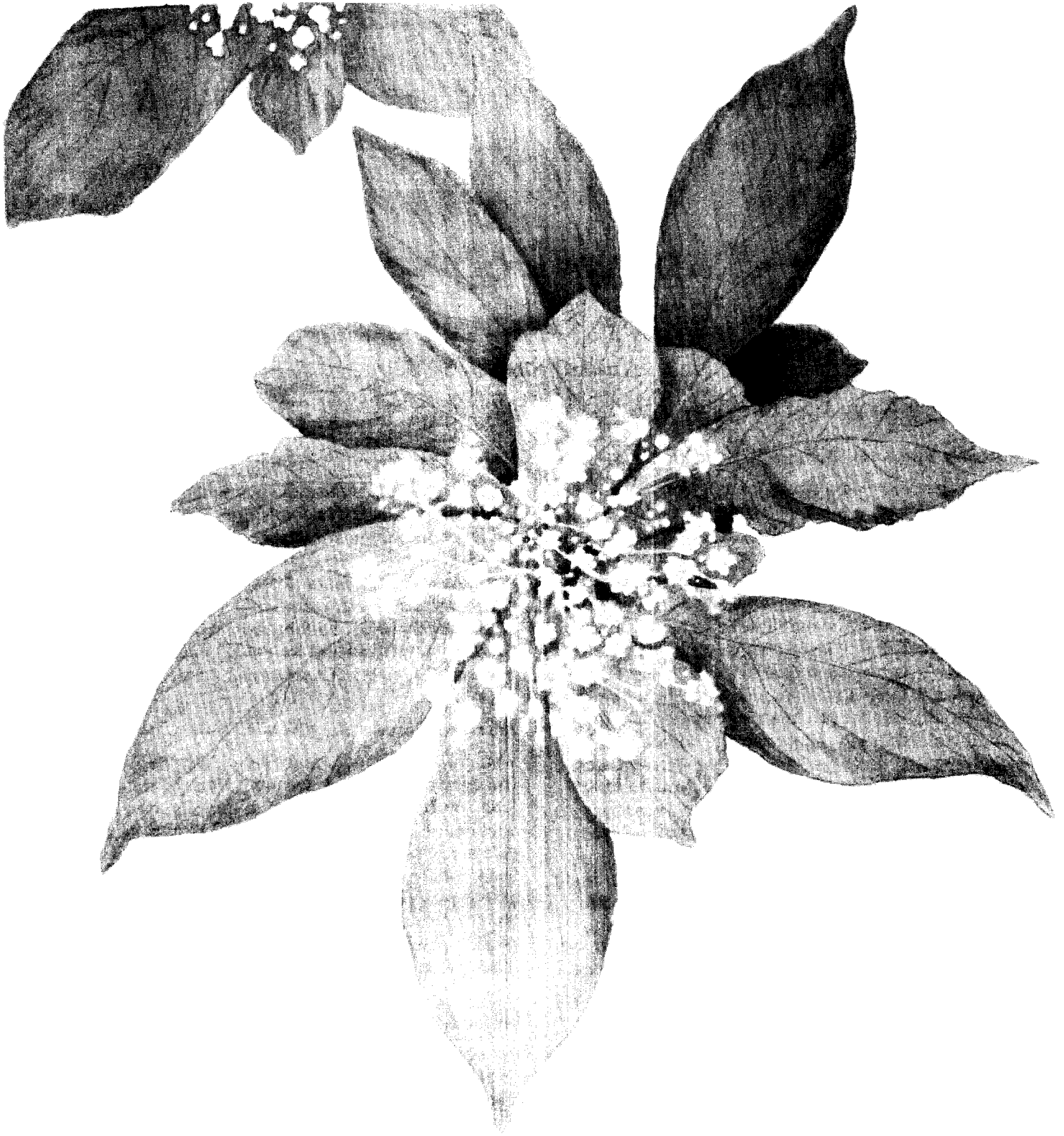
Ecological Value / Benefits

Wetland shrub communities, especially fleshy fruited species such as swamp dogwood, are great food sources for song birds and other species of wildlife. In addition to this species, shrubs such as elderberry, swamp rose, highbush blueberry, spicebush, *Lindera benzoin* (Wetland Flora No. 94-5 / July 1994); paw paw, *Asimina triloba* (Wetland Flora No. 93 - 12 / November 1994); and wax myrtle, *Myrica cerifera* (Wetland Flora No. 93-5 / May 1993) contribute food and cover for wildlife.

Wetland Indicator Status

According to the *National List of Plant Species that Occur in Wetlands: Virginia (1988)*, *Cornus amomum* is classified as a facultative wetland plant (FACW). FACW plants "usually occur in wetlands (estimated probability 67-99%)."

Cornus amomum Mill.



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