

Flower Tips

Forcing Flowering Branches

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Introduction

Cutting branches from your favorite flowering ornamental trees and shrubs and "forcing" them to bloom indoors during winter is a simple, colorful way to bring the outdoors inside. Forcing flowering branches, long before their normal flowering period, is an easy and inexpensive way to enjoy spring early, and an activity that many gardeners tend to overlook.

It is best to wait until after January 1 to collect branches for indoor forcing. Plants which flower early in spring form their flower buds during the previous fall before the plant goes dormant. A certain period of cold weather (under 40°F.), usually at least 8 weeks, is needed before the plant has overcome its dormancy requirement. Forcing before this time may result in only a few flowers opening at one time.

Procedure

After January 1, select the plants you would like to force and carefully prune selected branches from them. Be careful not to ruin the shape of the plants by pruning major branches. Pick a branch at least 12" long with many flower buds. The buds are usually found on the tips of branches that receive



a lot of sunlight. Flower buds are usually larger and have a more rounded shape than do leaf buds. To aid in identification, cut a few buds open to see if they contain flower parts.

Once pruned, bring the selected branches indoors. If possible, submerge the branches in a tub or large basin of tepid water overnight, then set them in a deep container of water.

Once in the container of water, keep the branches in a dimly lighted location at 60-65°F. Although branches could be brought into full sun and room temperatures immediately, the flower color, size and longevity may suffer. Change the water daily during the forcing period. Placing some powdered charcoal in the water may help keep it fresh. Spray the buds with water twice daily to help them

to open and to keep them from drying.

The closer to spring that branches are pruned, the less time it will take to force them indoors. Trees and shrubs can be cut before the recommended dates (see the following table), but it will take longer than indicated for the branches to bloom. Cutting after the suggested date will reduce the time for the plant to bloom indoors.

Utilizing Forced Branches

When the buds grow plump and begin to show color, arrange the branches in a vase or other decorative container and move them into a bright room. Keep the branches out of direct sunlight to help the flowers last longer. A cool room or the coolest location in a room

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will also help extend their flowering period. Display branches alone or mixed with cut flowers or foliage plants. The length of flowering is significantly prolonged by moving the branches back into cool (40-60°F.) temperatures at night.

Rooting

If a branch starts to root while in water, you may be able to start a new plant. Remove the branch from the water when the roots are $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{8}$ " long. Trim the branch to about 8". Pot the branch in a standard growing medium until permanent roots are formed. When the weather turns warm, plant the newly rooted plant outside. It may need protection for 1-2 years.

Forcing Schedule for Selected Woody Ornamental Plants

PLANT*	WHEN TO CUT	WEEKS TO FORCE
<i>Amelanchier</i> spp. (Serviceberry)	February	1-3
* <i>Acer rubrum</i> (Red Maple)	Late February	2
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> (Horsechestnut)	Mid-March	5-6
<i>Alnus incana</i> (Alder)	February	1-3
<i>Betula</i> spp. (Birch)	February	2-4
<i>Carya</i> spp. (Hickory)	March	2-3
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> (Redbud)	Early March	2-3
* <i>Chaenomeles</i> spp. (Japanese Quince)	Mid-February	4
<i>Cornus mas</i> (Cornelian cherry)	January	2
<i>Cornus</i> spp. (Dogwood)	Mid-March	2-3
<i>Deutzia</i> spp.	Early March	3-4
<i>Forsythia</i> spp.	Mid-January	1-3
<i>Hamamelis vernalis</i> (Witch Hazel)	January	1
<i>Kolkwitzia amabilis</i> (Beautybush)	Mid March	6
<i>Lonicera</i> spp. (Honeysuckle)	March	2-3
<i>Magnolia</i> spp.	Early March	3-5
* <i>Malus</i> spp. (Apple or Crabapple)	February to Mid-March	2-4
<i>Philadelphus</i> spp. (Mockorange)	Mid-March	4
<i>Prunus</i> spp. (Cherry)	Early February	2-4
<i>Pyrus communis</i> (Pear)	Late January	4-5
* <i>Salix</i> spp. (Willow)	January and February	2
<i>Spiraea</i> spp. (Spirea)	March	4
<i>Syringa</i> spp. (Lilac)	Early March	4-5
<i>Wisteria</i> spp.	March	3-5

*Indicates the species most easily forced.

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