

## FLOWERING SHRUBS CAN BE FORCED INDOORS NOW

This year spring can come early to your home. How? Just snip some branches from your flowering shrubs and force them into bloom. By now many shrubs have flower buds that are formed and ready to bloom. The recent cold weather was sufficient to break dormancy and all they require to burst open is warmth and moisture.

This procedure is quite simple. Anyone, even apartment dwellers, can succeed with this project. Start by selecting branches loaded with flower buds. You can identify the flower buds because they are more plump and more round than leaf buds. When cutting, select branches that have curves or bends that will create interesting blooming arrangements.

Since the branches will be in water several weeks, many of the clean cut ends will have a tendency to heal or form callus. This is not desirable because it restricts the water uptake. To prevent this healing, thoroughly pound with a hammer and shred the cut ends of the branches.

After the ends are prepared, submerge the bundle of branches overnight in a deep pail or tub of water, or wrap them in a damp cloth and put them in a plastic bag for a few days. This moistening and soaking loosens the bud scales and helps them to readily fall away as the flower expands.

After moistening operation is completed, stand the branches in a pail of water. A temperature of 60 degrees to 70 degrees F. is best for the developing flowers. Although the branches will force at higher temperatures, the color, size, and keeping quality of the blooms will be reduced. For this reason, it is also best to keep the branches out of direct sun.

Most branches will be well on their way to full bloom in two weeks or sooner. They will stay attractive for about one week. So, if you cut a few branches each week, you can have a succession of fresh flowers the rest of the winter.

Some of the most popular shrubs to force are forsythia and flowering quince. Other good plants for forcing are flowering crab, flowering almond, and spirea ... especially the double flowered spirea. Magnolia forces easily, too.

Although white flowering dogwood can be forced, it opens slowly and the bracts never develop as fully as outside. Lilac, because it is a complex compound flower, is also a challenge to force.

Finally, don't overlook trees when collecting branches for forcing. Red maple has an attractive but seldom noticed flower. Oak branches produce very interesting tiny leaves that change color as they unfold. And don't forget the pussy-willows. They are almost the trademark of spring.

**James A. Fizzell, Sr. Ext. Adviser  
Horticulture**

### "MARCH MIRAGE"

March, the month in which a new Spring is born,  
Bringing blessed delights, in various form.  
Impatiently We await It's manifestation,  
To welcome a new Season back from Winter vacation.  
Yes, We're all already, anxious to go,  
Let's get rid of that Ice and that Snow.  
Bring on that Springtime in high gear,  
We're eager and waiting, it's that time of year.

**Kenneth R. Zanzig**

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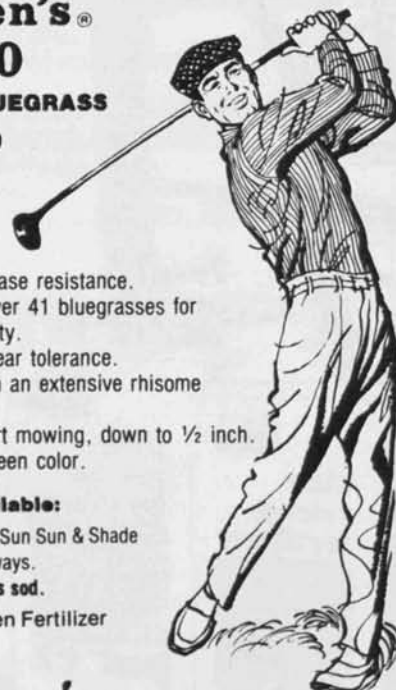
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