

Forcing Branches of Flowering Shrubs to Bloom



Winter days may be gloomy and dull, but you can give your home a touch of spring by forcing landscape branches to bloom indoors. Spring-flowering trees and shrubs set their flower buds the previous fall.

A branch can be cut and forced to bloom indoors, when buds have been exposed to cold for several months (usually by mid-January). The easiest branches to force include forsythia, pussy willow, honeysuckle, crabapple, redbud, magnolia and flowering dogwood.

Generally, shrub branches are easier to force than tree branches. Buds take from one to five weeks to open, depending on the plant you choose. The closer to the natural blooming time you cut the branches, the shorter the wait.

When you're selecting branches, choose healthy branches that are free from disease, insect and other injury. Consider the plant as much as you would when you are pruning. Cut the branch just above a side bud, being careful not to leave a stub. Take branches from crowded spots or other areas where they will not be missed.

The length of the cut branch can vary, but between 6 and 18 inches is a good length. Look for branches with many flower buds (usually larger and fatter than leaf buds). Cut the stem with a sharp knife or pruners. The stems should be recut just before placing in water. If you cut the branches when temperatures are below freezing, immerse the stems in cool water for several hours to prevent the buds from opening too soon.

Next, place the branches in an upright container and add hot water to cover no more than 3 inches of the stem. Allow to stand about one-half hour, then fill the container with cool water. Flowers will last longer if kept in a cool (60-65 degrees F) location, away from direct sunlight. Be sure to keep the container filled with water.

(By Don Janssen – University of Nebraska Extension)