

Forcing Shrub Branches for an Early Spring



Photo by Colleen Grant, Albemarle Garden Club
Forcing branches project

If the grey and gloom is getting to you, consider bundling up, heading outside and pruning some of your early blooming shrubs and force an early spring. The profusion of blooms and wonderful scents will brighten any winter day.

Early spring flowering trees and shrubs form their flower buds in the fall. With a cold period of at least 8 weeks, usually by the beginning of January, branches can be cut and forced to bloom indoors.

The closer to their actual bloom time you cut branches the easier they are to force. Forsythia, witchhazel, amelanchier, dogwood and spirea may only take two weeks to bloom once indoors. While other shrubs will take longer. Deutzia, Red twig dogwood, and beauty bush might take five weeks to force into bloom.

Follow good pruning practices by cutting 1/4 inch above a side bud or branch so you don't leave a stub.

After bringing the branches indoors make a second diagonal cut just above the original cut.

You may also want to split the end of the stem or smash it with a hammer to encourage water absorption. If the temperature is below freezing when you cut the branches, submerge them fully in a tub of cool water for at least several hours or overnight. This keeps the buds from bursting too quickly. The soaking step is not necessary if the temperature is above freezing.

Next, put the branches in a vertical container to hold them upright. Add warm water about 3 inches up the stems and allow to sit for 20-30 minutes. Then fill the container with more cool water. Keep the branches in a cool place. Change the water regularly and mist the branches frequently.

Once the buds begin to show color move the branches to a warmer, lighted room but don't put them in direct sunlight. Now these branches can be artistically arranged and you will begin to enjoy a bit of early spring.

Your cuttings may even show rooting which is also exciting. Once the roots are at least 1/4 long remove from the water and cut the branch to 6-8 inches. Pot individually in some rich soil and keep moist. Once spring has arrived outdoors too then you can plant your cutting in the ground but you might want to select a protected place until well established.

Spring will be here before you know it!

Kim Cory, Albemarle Garden Club

Sources:

Catherine Madden, GCV Horticulture Chair

Department of Horticulture, Purdue University Cooperative Extension Service