

Garden Project: Forcing Branches

Cut some branches for forcing indoors. Forcing spring bloomers is an easy task. The hardest part is probably getting outside in the cold weather.

When to cut the branches? Spring blooming trees and shrubs form their buds in the fall. These spring bloomers require a period of cold dormancy in order to bloom. It depends on the weather each season, but by mid-February, most spring bloomers have had sufficient cold to allow forcing them into bloom indoors.

How to cut the branches? Cut the branches on a warm day. Look for plump buds. Flower buds are more plump and rounder than leaf buds. Cut branches that are at least 12" long. Flower buds are rounder and larger than leaf buds. Cut the base of the branches in an X pattern to provide more surface area to take up water. This is even better than smashing the bottoms of the branches which can have the opposite effect. Put all your branches in a bucket of warm water, give them a good misting and place in a cool room. The misting will allow them to take in water faster and help prevent bud drop. Keeping them in a cool room will slow down the maturation time but help insure flowers develop and open properly. Change the water every 2 to 3 days to keep it clean. Once the buds start to color up you can use them in arrangements as the flowers will open soon.

What to cut when?

January:

Forsythia (yellow flowers, one to 3 weeks to force)

Witch Hazel (yellow flowers, one week to force)

Pussy Willow (one to 2 weeks to force)

February

Serviceberry (one to 3 weeks to force)

Apples and Crabapples (2 to 4 weeks to force with doubles slower than singles)

Quince (4 weeks to force)

Cherries (2 to 4 weeks to force)

Rhododendrons and Azaleas later in the month (4 to 6 weeks to force)

March

All the above plus:

Lilacs (4 to 5 weeks to force)

Spirea (4 weeks to force)

Mock Orange (4 to 5 weeks to force)