

Forcing Flowering Plant Material

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Overview:

Branches from flowering trees and shrubs can be forced into bloom indoors easily and inexpensively. We plant these plants because of their flowers. Why not use them as cut flowers before and during their natural bloom period? Occasionally, nature throws us a curve and brings bud killing temperatures close to bloom time. We can beat nature at its own game by harvesting branches with live buds and forcing them into bloom on our terms.

Procedure:

Plant material will need to have a chilling and dormant period prior to blooming. After a period of at least 8 weeks of temperatures below 40° F (usually after January), branches can be cut and forced into bloom. The closer it is to their natural bloom time, the shorter time required for forcing.

Harvest desirable branches at least 10 to 18 inches long depending on their use. Consider the shape of the stock plant upon harvest to keep its appearance pleasing. Select branches that are well-budded with a large number of large and round flower buds. Best results occur with medium to young branches. Use sharp pruning shears to minimize damage to the stock plant. Small round pruning cuts are best for quick sealing and continued health of the stock plant. Cut about ¼ inch above a side bud or branch so that no stub is left behind.

Put cut branches into water immediately. Cutting stems underwater insures good water uptake. If possible, totally, submerge the branches in room temperature water overnight. A washtub or bathtub works well for this. This soaking allows the branches and buds to begin to break dormancy without the buds bursting prematurely. Then place the cut ends in a bucket of water. A clear plastic bag can be put over the branches to keep the humidity up. Change the water every other day. Place the branches in a relatively cool place of 60°F to develop.

Using Branches:

When the flower buds are well developed and showing color, remove the branches from the buckets. Arrange them in your display. Branches that are removed from the buckets at this stage are less likely to have bruised and broken flowers. Arranging the branches at this stage also allows the enjoyment of watching the flowers open. You may need to recut the stems underwater to improve water up take. Keep ample water in the container at all times.

Flowering branches may be displayed with other flowers, foliage plants, or by themselves for striking displays. The branches should be kept in a bright, but not sunny location. They will last longer if they can be moved to a cool (40-60°F) location at night.

Plant	Color	Harvest	Weeks until bloom	Comments
<i>Acer palmatum</i> —Japanese Maple	Red	March	2	Finely cut leaves
<i>Acer rubrum</i> —Red Maple	Red	Late February	2	Small, unusual-looking blooms
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> —Horsechestnut	Various	Mid-March	5-6	Umbrella like foliage, pyramidal flowers
<i>Alnus</i> spp.—Alder	Tan	February	1-3	Long lasting
<i>Amelanchier</i> spp.—Serviceberry	White	February	1-4	Cherry-like blossoms
<i>Betula</i> spp.—Birch	Tan	February	2-4	Long lasting
<i>Carya</i> spp.—Hickory	Tan	March	2-3	Drooping, three-branched spikes
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> —Redbud	Pink	Early March	2-3	Clusters of flowers
<i>Chaenomeles</i> spp.—Quince	Red/Orange	Mid-February	4	Long lasting
<i>Cornus</i> spp.—Dogwood	Cream	March	2	Bright color stems
<i>Corylus</i> spp.—Hazelnut	Tan	Late January	2-3	Long lasting
<i>Crataegus</i> spp.—Hawthorn	White	Mid-March	4-5	
<i>Deutzia</i> spp.—Deutzia	White	Early March	3-4	
<i>Forsythia</i> spp.—Forsythia	Yellow	Mid-January	1-3	
<i>Hamamelis</i> spp.—Witchhazel	Yellow	January	1	Very early, spicy fragrance
<i>Kolkwitzia amabilis</i> —Beautybush	Pink	Mid-March	6	
<i>Lonicera</i> spp.—Honeysuckle	White	March	2-3	Some are fragrant
<i>Magnolia</i> spp.—Magnolia	Several	Early March	3-5	
<i>Malus</i> spp.—Apple	Several	February	2-4	Doubles are slower than singles
<i>Philadelphus</i> spp.—Mockorange	White	Mid-March	4-5	
<i>Prunus glandulosa</i> —Almond	Pink	March	2-3	
<i>Prunus</i> spp.—Cherry	White	Early February	2-4	Many types
<i>Prunus</i> spp.—Peach	Pink	Early February	4	
<i>Pyrus</i> spp.—Pear	White	Late January	4-5	Fruiting spurs
<i>Rhus</i> spp.—Sumac	Yellow	Mid-March	2-3	Flowers in clustered spikes
<i>Ribes</i> spp.—Currant	Yellow	Late March	1-2	Some are fragrant
<i>Salix discolor</i> —Pussy Willow	Yellow	February	2	Fuzzy
<i>Spiraea</i> spp.—Spirea	White	March	4	Double flower types last longer
<i>Syringa</i> spp.—Lilac	Several	Early March	4-5	Fragrant