

HORTICULTURE NEWSLETTER

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Forcing Flowers Indoors

During the cold days of winter I often can't wait for the return of color to the outdoors. One way to get a jump on enjoying some of this color is to force blooming indoors.

Many trees and shrubs form their flower buds during the previous year of growth. After at least 8 weeks of cool weather the branches are ready to overcome the dormant period. By providing spring-like temperatures and plenty of moisture, the flowers will open. The requirements and timing vary from plant to plant but there are some standards to abide by.

You should carefully prune branches from the plant of choice making sure injury does not occur. Young branches that are at least 10- 12 inches long are best. The branches should be well budded and remember that flower buds are larger and rounder than leaf buds. If necessary you can cut a few buds open to look for flower parts to help determine the type of bud you are looking at.

Once cut, the branches should be brought indoors and the ends should be placed in water immediately. Re-cutting the ends of the branches under water helps insure good water uptake. If possible, totally submerge the branch in room temperature water and leave it overnight. A bathtub will work well for this. The soaking will allow the branch to begin the process of breaking dormancy without buds bursting prematurely. If you can't submerge it overnight, just leave the branch ends in water and mist the branches frequently for a few days. It is also best to keep a clear plastic bag over the ends of the branches when they aren't submerged to help maintain good humidity levels.

After the soaking or spraying, it is time to force the flowers. Place the branches in a bucket of water and move to a cool place. The temperature should be cool (50-60) degrees since higher temperatures can cause the buds to develop too rapidly. High temperatures also usually come with a lower humidity level that can cause buds to fall off. It may be a good idea to re-cut the ends again under water to insure proper water uptake. Keep a clear plastic bag over the branches to maintain humidity.

The branches need good light, but avoid putting them in direct sunlight since heat from the direct sun will be too intense. To help the buds open and keep them from drying, mist the branches occasionally during the forcing period. The closer to spring that branches are forced, the shorter the time required until bloom.

As soon as the buds are showing color, remove the branches from the bucket and put them in a display. If the branches are removed from the bucket just before opening you are less likely to have damage occur as you arrange them. Continue to keep the arrangement in a bright but not sunny location. The flowers will last longer if they are placed in a cool (40-60 degree) location at night.

Remember to keep fresh water in the bucket or vase and then enjoy the flowers!

Here are plants to force in January: Witchhazel, Hazelnut, Pear, and Forsythia. In February force these: Red Maple, Alder, Serviceberry, Birch, Quince, Apple, Cherry, Peach, and finally force these plants in March: Honeysuckle, Hickory, Redbud, Beautybush, Magnolia, Currant, Mockorange, Sumac, Lilac, Deutzia and Spirea.



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