



## Prince Edward County Master Gardeners

### Forcing Branches for Spring Colour



#### **What and When**

-Pussy Willows and Forsythia are the easiest to force and they will open the quickest.

**Mid January to Early March:** Azaleas, Forsythia, pussy willow, flowering almond, mahonia, viburnum, serviceberry, witch hazel, red dogwood

**Late February- Early March:** beauty bush, apple, crabapple, pear, cherry, magnolia, redbud, spirea, Japanese red maple

#### **Picking the Branches**

- If possible choose a warm sunny day, 6-8 weeks before the natural blooming
- take along secateurs, or a sharp knife, a bucket with tepid water
- try to shape the shrub as you select the branches to force
- branches can be from 12" up, 18" is a good length
- young branches will have more blooms, look for fat round buds (cut one open?)
- place the cut branches in the bucket of water immediately

#### **Inside**

- if it's very cold outside, submerge whole branches in slightly warm water for several hours –this prevents the buds from bursting pre-maturely
- have ready a tall vase with 3" of cool water
- re-cut the stem ends at a long angle, cut a single 1" vertical slit
- place stems in 3" cool water for 20-30 minutes, then fill the vase with floral preservative water to the height it will always be
- arrange the branches while the buds are closed as they are easily knocked off just before blooming
- mist the branches
- cover with plastic (dry cleaning bag) buds must not dry out!
- place in a cool spot out of the sun
- check frequently and change the water every day or two, always with preservative
- buds will start to open in 1-6 weeks
- the closer they are to blooming time when picked, the sooner they will open
- move them out into bright light, but not sun, 22 deg. C
- the brighter the light, the better the colour of the flowers
- prolong blooming by moving them to a cooler place at night
- pussy willows can be dried by taking them out of the water when they open and move them to a dry vase
- Pussy willows and some others left in water will develop roots –these can be potted up for outdoor planting later

### **Homemade Floral Preservatives**

2 cups 7-Up

2 cups water

1/2 tsp. chlorine bleach

Mix with 4 cups water.

2 Tbsp. fresh lemon juice

1 Tbsp. sugar

1/2 tsp. chlorine bleach

2 Tbsp. white vinegar

2 Tbsp. Sugar 1/2 tsp. chlorine bleach

For more gardening advice contact us at: [pecmastergardeners@gmail.com](mailto:pecmastergardeners@gmail.com)

Or visit our web page at: <http://pecmastergardeners.com>