



Virginia Green Industry Council

For Immediate Use

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Electronic Version:

www.viriniagreen.org

Advance Spring by Forcing Branches

Later winter is a great time for gardeners to get an early start on spring. The stores are filled with seed packets and spring flowering plants. All of these plants have had their flowering advanced by growing them in a cool greenhouse. You can have a sneak peak at spring by cutting branches of shrubs and trees in your yard, bringing them into your home, and accelerating their flowering weeks or months ahead, according to Lin Diacont, President of the Virginia Green Industry Council. Any type of branch can be cut; only a few, however, develop properly and give an acceptable display.

Most woody plants have chilling requirements for the resting buds to break dormancy and resume growth. By mid to late February, this chilling requirement should be satisfied for all woody landscape plants.

The flower buds should be visible on the branches you select. Flower buds are always dominant to leaf/shoot buds. Select branches with many visible flower buds and do not be concerned about the development of leaves.

The branches can be removed from any part of the plant. However, only the top branches have the most flower buds and compact growth. Cut the branches, bundle them in plastic to keep them from drying out and store them in a cool place until you are ready to force them.

Condition the branches by re-cutting them and putting them in water that is 90-110°F. There is no need to bruise the stems as this actually prevents the branches from taking up the water. Wrap the branches and container in a large sheet of plastic to create a high humidity-high temperature environment, which favors the re-hydration of the branches, the expansion of the dried covering scales, and the activation of the dormant flower buds. Use clean containers and replace the water twice a week during the forcing process.

The branches will expand to their full potential in the dim light and ambient temperature of your home. The flower color may be paler than what you observe on the same branches when allowed to develop out-of-doors. Reduce the flowers and foliage on the branches prior to using them in designs.

Some of the most successful branches to force are: Shadblow, Birch, Dogwood, Forsythia, Witch Hazel, Saucer Magnolia, Crabapple, Barberry, Cherry, Plum, Pear, and Willows.

The consumer website www.VirginiaGardening.com has additional gardening information.

The Virginia Green Industry Council is the voice of the horticulture industry in the Commonwealth and is dedicated to enhancing the beauty of the state's environment, the well-being of our citizens, improving our state's economy, and improving the health and wellness for everyone in Virginia. The Council is made up of providers and consumers of horticultural products and services. The Council works to provide public and industry education, environmental guidelines and other information that will keep Virginia green and growing. For more information, visit www.viriniagreen.org. 540-382-0943 FAX: 540-382-2716

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