

# FORCING SPRINGTIME BRANCHES

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The easiest branches to force are forsythias and pussy willow because they naturally appear the earliest outdoors. Others, such as larch, bittersweet, and ninebark are forced for the foliage. Branches that require more time, warmth, and patience are magnolia, crabapples, Eastern redbud, and flowering cherry. Most branches can be forced in 1 - 4 weeks.

## **PROCEDURE:**

- 1) **Cut** branches on a day with temperatures above 40 degrees. Select branches with plenty of flower buds.
- 2) **Bundle** branches for ease of handling and remove any buds below the water line of your bucket or vase. Before using, clean any container with a mixture of 1 part bleach to 10 parts water.
- 3) **Soak** branches overnight in lukewarm water in a large tub. If it has been longer than 20 minutes since you first cut the stems, make a fresh cut. Lay the branches flat in the tub, submerging them totally. Anchor the branches if necessary so they don't float.
- 4) **Hydrate** the branches by cutting the ends again. Place them in a tall, clean bucket. The bucket should contain a solution of 1 capful of bleach to 2 gallons of tepid water. (The bleach solution helps control bacteria which may clog the branch's vascular system and inhibit water absorption.) Mist the branches and cover loosely with a clear plastic bag. Store out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources. Temperatures between 50 and 60 degrees during the day and 40 degrees at night are ideal. Mist daily and change the bleach water every week.
- 5) **Enjoy** the branches as they start to emerge. Check them each day. When green foliage starts to emerge, the branches can be moved to a warmer location. Recut the stems and add floral preservative (available for purchase at Dundee Floral). Keep room temperatures below 72 degrees during the day and cooler at night. Misting does help prolong quality, especially for flowering-type branches.

If you are purchasing branches from a florist, simply recut the stems, add floral preservative, and enjoy.

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