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## G88-868 Forcing Flowering Branches

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## Forcing Flowering Branches

**This guide explains the procedure for forcing flowering branches, discusses the use of flowering branches in decorating or display and provides a chart of plant type, color, cutting and forcing times.**

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### Introduction

Branches from flowering trees and shrubs can be forced into bloom easily and inexpensively. Flowering branches can bring the outdoors inside and add color during a long winter. These branches also give the floral designer some unique and inexpensive alternatives.

Trees and shrubs which bloom early in the spring form flower buds the previous fall before dormancy. After at least 8 weeks of cold weather (under 40° F) the branches are ready to overcome dormancy and are capable of blooming. By undergoing spring-like temperatures and moisture, the flowers are forced open.

Successful forcing depends on the type of plant, cultivar, stage of dormancy, and temperature. This publication provides guidelines for successful forcing.

### Procedure

To insure good results and to be sure that branches have fulfilled their dormancy requirements, it is best to wait until after January 1 to begin forcing branches. Carefully prune out branches, taking care not to injure the plant or ruin the shape of the plant.

Select branches that are well-budded, i.e. with a large number of flower buds. Best results will occur with younger branches because they have more flower buds. Flower buds are usually larger and rounder than leaf buds. If there is a question, cut a few buds open and look for flower parts. Some fruit trees bear flowers on short fruit spurs. Watch for these on apples, pears, and ornamental crabapples.

Select branches at least 12 inches long, pruning them flush with the trunk or main branch. By pruning flush, the wound will heal over quickly, with little danger of insect or disease damage. Be sure to use sharp pruning shears to minimize damage.

Once the branches have been cut, bring them indoors and place the stem ends in water immediately. 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. Following this, place the branches in a bucket of water. Water may need to be changed often to prevent it from becoming foul.

Another method, if soaking is not possible, is to place the cut ends of the branches directly into buckets of water and mist the branches frequently the first few days. A piece of damp burlap should be wrapped around the branches to help maintain high humidity.

After spraying or soaking, the branches are ready for forcing. The branches should be placed in a relatively cool place (60 - 65°F) to develop. Higher temperatures will cause the buds to develop rapidly, but size, color, and quality may be sacrificed. Along with higher temperatures often goes lower humidity which may cause buds to dry out and fall off. Branches need light for forcing, but not direct sunlight. Heat from direct sun is too intense. If you remember the springtime conditions when these plants bloom naturally, it will be easy to remember the conditions they need.

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.

### Using Branches

When the flower buds are well developed and showing color, remove the branches from the buckets and arrange them for 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.

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 TYPE	BLOOM COLOR	WHEN TO CUT	WEEKS	COMMENTS
<i>Acer palmatum</i> (Japanese Maple)	N/A	March	2	finely cut leaves
<i>Acer rubrum</i> (Red Maple)	Pink to Red	Late February	2	leaves come out as the blossoms dry
<i>Aesculus hippocastanum</i> (Horsechestnut)	White-yellow & pink to shades of purple & red	Mid-March	5-6	umbrella like foliage, pyramids of flowers
<i>Alnus incan</i> (Alder)	Catkins	February	1-3	long lasting
<i>Amelanchier</i> spp. (Serviceberry)	white	February	1-4	cherry-like blossoms
<i>Betula</i> spp. (Birch)	Catkins	February	2-4	long lasting
<i>Carya</i> spp.				

(Hickory)	Catkins	March	2-3	new foliage attractive
<i>Cercis canadensis</i> (Redbud)	Rosy to magenta pink	Early March	2-3	flowers cover the twigs in clusters, leaves come out to keep blossoms dry
<i>Chaenomeles</i> spp. (Japanese Quince)	Red-orange	Mid- February	4	especially colorful
<i>Cornus mas</i> (Cornelian Cherry)	Yellow	January	2	bright color
<i>Cornus</i> spp. (Dogwood)	White & pink	Mid-March	2-3	
<i>Corylus</i> spp. (Hazelnut or Filbert)	Catkins	Late January	2-3	long lasting
<i>Crataegus</i> spp. (Hawthorn)	White, pink or scarlet	Mid-March	4-5	
<i>Cytisus scoparius</i> (Scotch Broom)	Lavender	Late January	4-6	leaves outlast the blossoms, valuable as line material
<i>Deutzia</i> spp. (Deutzia)	White	Early March	3-4	
<i>Forsythia</i> spp. (Forsythia)	Yellow	Mid-January	1-3	
<i>Fothergilla</i> spp. (Fothergilla)	White	March	2-3	fragrant
<i>Hamamelis vernalis</i> (Witch Hazel)	Yellow	January	1	very early, spicy fragrance
<i>Kalmia latifolia</i> (Mountain Laurel)	White to deep pink	Mid-March	5	beautiful flowers
<i>Kolkwitzia amabilis</i> (Beautybush)	Pink	Mid-March	6	
<i>Lonicera</i> spp. (Honeysuckle)	White to pink	March	2-3	some with fragrant flowers
<i>Magnolia</i> spp. (Magnolia)	Creamy white to deep red	Early March	3-5	beautiful flowers
<i>Malus</i> spp. (Apple/Crabapple)	White, pink, dark red	February to Mid-March	2-4	double flowering types force more slowly but last longer
<i>Philadelphus</i> spp. (Mockorange)	White	Mid-March	4-5	
<i>Populus</i> spp. (Poplar)	Catkins	January	3	long lasting
<i>Prunus</i> spp. (Cherry)	White & pink	Early February	2-4	many types
<i>Pyrus</i> spp.	White	Late January	4-5	flowers on fruiting spurs

(Pear)				
<i>Quercus</i> spp. (Oak)	Catkins	March	2-3	young leaves are pinkish
<i>Rhododendron</i> spp. (Rhododendron or Azalea)	White through pink, lavender, lilac to red	Late February	4-6	many different types
<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)	N/A	February	1-2	remove bud scales to help preserve, display out of water to prevent rooting
<i>Sax</i> spp. (Willow)	Catkins	January & February	2	
<i>Spiraea</i> spp. (Spirea)	White	March	4	double flower types last longer
<i>Syringa</i> spp. (Lilac)	White to deep crimson, lilac, pink, some near blue	Early March	4-5	very ornamental, fragrant
<i>Wisteria</i> spp. (Wisteria)	Violet	March	3-4	

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