

## **Forcing branches for winter bouquets**

The flowers of some shrubs and trees can be "forced," induced to bloom, indoors while the winter weather outside continues. Some of the easiest to force include pussy willows (*Salix* spp), flowering quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*), and forsythias (*Forsythia* spp.).

Among the pussy willows, the Japanese pussy willow (*Salix chaenomeloides*), a small tree that reaches about 18 feet, has three-inch long, fuzzy pink flowers known as "catkins". The black pussy willow grows to 10 feet and has purple-black catkins.

Flowering quince is a six to 10 foot shrub with flowers that are usually orange-red. There are also pink and white flowering forms. Forsythias come in many shapes and shades of yellow. One of the earliest to bloom is called early forsythia (*Forsythia ovata*), which blooms from March to April.

To force the branches of any one of these shrubs, cut them in January or February. Submerge the branches in tepid water overnight. The next day, place the branches upright in a container of water, making sure to cut off any buds from the parts of the stem below water in the vase. Leave the branches in a cool, dimly-lit room and change the water daily until the buds start to swell. Then, move them to a brightly-lit room and enjoy the colorful display!

[http://www.ahs.org/gardening\\_q\\_and\\_a/winter\\_gardening\\_tips.htm](http://www.ahs.org/gardening_q_and_a/winter_gardening_tips.htm)