



Trowel Talk!

February 2018

Flowering branches bring spring inside

Even though winter took its own sweet time arriving, my thoughts are already racing ahead to spring. I am fervently hoping that it will be more punctual!! But I can assure myself of some early colour by gathering branches from spring-blooming shrubs and forcing them to leaf out and bloom indoors. If you are feeling the symptoms of early spring fever, I suggest you try this too.

Starting now, you can collect branches from the earliest blooming shrubs like forsythia, serviceberry (*Amelanchier*) and pussy willow (*Salix discolor*). In two to three weeks you should have a spirit-lifting display of bright yellow forsythia, fragrant white serviceberry and furry silver-grey pussy willow blooms. Pear (*Pyrus*) and cherry (*Prunus*) can also be harvested at this time but will take a month or more to flower. Wait until March to collect dogwood (*Cornus*), crabapple (*Malus*) and mock orange (*Philadelphus*). Other possibilities are quince (*Chaenomeles*), honeysuckle (*Lonicera*) and even lilac (*Syringa*). You can try any spring blooming shrub that needs regular pruning. A general rule is to start the force within two months of the

natural bloom time.

Harvest the branches on a sunny day. Use a sharp cutting tool and put the cut ends of the branches in water as soon as possible. The lengths you cut will depend on the size of your container and display space but longer branches make a better show. Select branches that have many swelling buds. Consider the shape of the plant when you cut - work your way around it, picking branches from all sides.

You can find a variety of instructions on how to prepare the branches but all agree that success depends on the uptake of water through the stem. Most techniques suggest that the stem should be recut on the diagonal under water and the end split for 2-3 cm to expose a greater surface to the water. As always, remove buds and twigs that fall below the water's surface.

Put some floral preservative or a few drops of hydrogen peroxide in the water and place your arrangement in a spot where you can see it every day. It should get bright but indirect light and the air temperature should be about 20 °C. It will help to mist the branches occasionally, especially if the humidity in the room is low. You will have to add water to the container on a regular basis and change it occasionally. It is a treat to see the leaves emerge and the flowers open.

Pussy willow and forsythia force so easily that they sometimes form roots. If this happens, pot them up and later plant them outside. They

will be a good source for cutting branches in future years. If you remove the pussy willows from the water as soon as they bloom and allow them to air dry, they can be used as everlastings in other arrangements.

The real bonus is that these cheerful and eye-catching blooms can be enjoyed for little effort and almost no cost.

*Kelly Noel
Master Gardener*



Pussy Willow, Forsythia flowers

Photos: Monique Paré

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February To Do

- Check houseplants for pests and diseases.
- Monitor bulbs and tubers in storage to see they aren't drying out or showing signs of rot.
- Look at seed packets to determine stratification needs and timing for starting seeds.
- Attend a garden club meeting or lecture.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

Amaryllis are lovely to have in the winter, with their dramatic flowers. With a little work, you can save this year's and have it bloom again next winter.

Wait until the flower stalk turns yellow, then cut it off. Leave the leaves on. Put it in a sunny location, water it when the top 2" of soil are dry, and feed it once or twice a month with 5-10-5 fertilizer or similar.

After last frost, move the pot outside in the shade, and gradually acclimatize it to sun. Sink the pot into the soil in a sunny location, keep it watered, and feed it once a month until late August. Reduce watering over three weeks, then stop watering, to let the bulb go dormant. When the leaves shrivel and go yellow, cut them down to a couple inches.

In late September or early October, take up the pot. Put it in a dry, dark, location of about 50-60° F (10-15° C) for 8-10 weeks. It should show a new stalk starting to emerge from the bulb. You can repot it in fresh soil at this point, but don't plant it deeper than before. Then move the pot to a sunny windowsill, and water it as needed, starting the cycle again.

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener*

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

Ottawa Seedy Saturday

Saturday March 3rd—10:00 am to 3:00 pm

Ron Kolbus, Lakeside Centre, Ottawa

Ottawa Home Show

March 22nd – 25th

EY Centre, Ottawa

<https://ottawahomeshow.com/>

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

February 15th – 7:30 pm

Edibles in the Garden

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

City View, United Church, 6 Epworth Avenue, Nepean

Hosted by Nepean Horticultural Society (guest fee \$4).

March 6th – 7:30 pm

From Shade to Sun: Converting a Garden

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Old Town Hall 821, March Road, Kanata

Hosted by Kanata March Horticultural Society (guest fee \$5).

March 10th - 1:00 pm

Thugs, Bullies, and Sneaks: Plants to be Wary of

Rebecca Last, Master Gardener

Canada Blooms, Enercare Centre, Exhibition Place, 100 Princess Blvd, Toronto

Talk is free with the price of admission to the show.

March 12th – 7:00 pm

The Art of Rock Gardening

Robert Stuart, Master Gardener

Old Firehall, 260 Sunnyside Ave

Hosted by Old Ottawa South Garden Club (guest fee \$7).

March 12th – 7:00 pm

Reviving a Tired Garden

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener

Main Hall RCMP, Long Island Campground, 451 Nicolls Island Road, Manotick

Hosted by the Manotick Horticultural Society, (guest fee \$5).

March 13th – 7:00 pm

Lawn Panel

Ian Frei, Judith Cox, Master Gardener, Susan Bicket, Master Gardener

Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Road, Carp

Hosted by West Carleton Garden Club and Horticultural Society (guest fee \$5).

March 26th – 7:00 pm

Flowers with Vegetables

Judith Cox, Master Gardener

In the lower hall at: Brockville Wesleyan Church, 33 Central Avenue West, Brockville

Hosted by Brockville Horticultural Society (guest fee \$2).



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>