



Forcing Twigs for Indoor Bloom

Overview

- A fun, easy activity to do with children and youth.
- Appropriate for audiences with special needs, this activity requires minimal manual dexterity, and can be easily completed by people who use one hand.
- Great winter activity!

Step by step

1. Take some extra time in advance of the activity to locate and cut some branches. Be sure to:
 - Take only material you need, and do not prune heavily from one bush or tree.
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 - Prune the branches carefully, choosing those with plump fruiting buds.
 - Note that flower buds are larger, plumper and in clusters, where as leaf buds tend to be smaller and more pointed.
 - This activity makes it fun to identify several different types of spring flowering trees and shrubs, such as forsythia or crabapple. You can force all spring flowering trees and shrubs can be forced into bloom, but some are easier than others.
2. Bring cut branches to the activity session.
3. Cut the branches to length before the activity unless some of the participants are able to use pruning shears. Use shorter rather than longer twigs to make the arrangements because they are easier to handle.
4. Ask around for contributions of interesting containers and crocks (large coffee mugs are nice.) These simple arrangements are great for any occasion.

What does "forcing" mean anyway?

"Forcing" describes the process of coaxing flowers into bloom indoors, after they have completed their winter dormancy requirement. Materials cut after January 15 usually open well when brought indoors.

Materials

- Bucket to hold branches
- Containers to hold arrangements
- Water

"Which twigs should we force?"

The easiest materials for flowers or pretty buds are:

- Forsythia
- Pussy Willow
- Larch
- Crabapples
- Apples
- Redbud
- Peaches
- Cherries
- Flowering quince
- Cornelian cherry (a type of dogwood)
- Alder
- Birch

Go one step further...

Enjoy your forced flower blossoms by making them into flower arrangements.

Place different types of stems in each arrangement, since some, such as forsythia, will bloom more quickly than others. Forsythia usually opens within a week, while flowering quince and apple may take 10 - 12 days. Pruning branches requires some care with pruning shears, but otherwise, the activity requires little manual dexterity. You can put together loose arrangements of branches relatively quickly (20 minutes to 1/2 hour, depending on the group).

Hint:

Remember that some participants will be able to work more easily if the container is kept from sliding around the table. Use a place-mat sized piece of non-slip shelf-liner under the container to keep it from moving. If necessary, a well-dampened washcloth, or wrung-out wet towel spread under the container will keep it from shifting.