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Only Polite Pushing Please!

by MaryAnn Fink

A bundle of branches bursting with buds reminds us spring is just around the corner. Did you know with just a polite push many flowering shrubs and trees can be encouraged to bloom or leaf out early in your home?

Not all trees and shrubs require pruning to be attractive and healthy. But if in fact you find your self trimming a few particular favorites occasionally, try to time it best for the most enjoyment as well as the health of the plant. Spring flowering shrubs and trees set their buds shortly after their bloom period, usually early to mid summer in the lower Midwest.

Select with many plump buds but avoid removing too many from one particular section and always use good pruning technique. Collect just a few so you can repeat the process a few times before spring. Be sure to use a sharp blade and do not disfigure the natural shape of the shrub or tree.

With bypass pruners or a sharp knife, carefully split the cut end, one to three inches. Place cut branches in a container of warm water and recut a small amount from the base of the stem, under water. This will help prevent air from entering the stem through the cut end, blocking water uptake. Remove any buds and twigs that will be under water to help keep the water fresh.

Place containers in bright but indirect light where temperature are between 60 -70 degrees. Change the water every few days. You may add a floral preservative to the container water to help control bacteria. The closer it is to the natural bloom cycle when you cut the branches, the sooner they will open!

Here is a sampling of a few of my favorites. If you don't have any shrubs or trees to prune, consider visiting your florist and see their selection. Many of them may not be hardy in this area as a plant but still can be quite pretty. If any branches take root-they may be suitable for outdoors after much TLC. If it is not a plant that normally lives here- be sure to make sure it is not a problem or invasive plant for our area. Here are several that perform well here both for forcing and for planting!

- Cercis canadensis-Redbud
- Chaenomeles spp-Japanese or Flowering Quince
- Cornus florida-Flowering Dogwood
- Hamamelis vernalis-Vernal Witch Hazel
- Crataegus spp-Hawthorn
- Forsythia spp-Forsythia
- Magnolia soulangiana-Saucer Magnolia
- Magnolia stellata-Star Magnolia
- Malus spp-Apple and Crabapple
- Prunus spp-Flowering Almond, Cherry & Plum
- Salix caprea-European Pussy Willow
- Syringa spp-Lilac
- Viburnum spp-Viburnum

