

THE GARDEN GATE

A Community Newsletter by the Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners

FEBRUARY 2022



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Welcome, everyone, to the Rockbridge Area Master Gardener community newsletter.

It has been a year since we began publication of this newsletter, and our mailing list has reached almost 450 subscribers. Thank you, everyone!

Each month we bring you relevant seasonal horticultural information for Rockbridge County. If you enjoy this newsletter, please pass it on.

Virginia Master Gardeners are Virginia Cooperative Extension volunteers, extending horticultural and environmental outreach across the commonwealth. Volunteers receive fifty hours of training and are required to do, at the minimum, 20 hours of volunteering per year and 8 hours of Continuing Education to maintain their MG status.

The Rockbridge MG organization is a very active one with a membership that hovers around 100. You will see us working at local plant clinics (now virtually on Zoom), maintaining school yard gardens (Waddell Elementary and Natural Bridge Elementary), historic gardens (Stonewall Jackson House Museum and Paxton House), native plant gardens (Boxerwood and the Buena Vista Visitors Center), answering questions at the Help Desk in the Extension Office, giving programs and workshops, or manning our May plant sale. Our 2022 class is full and has already started training. Keep an eye open in this newsletter for information on recruitment for the class of 2023.

HAPPENINGS...

Local events are in a larger font

February 9, Wednesday, February 10, Thursday, 9:00 am – 4:15pm, “Building Plant Diversity Builds Resilient Landscapes”, Winter Symposium and CVNLA Short Course, Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden, Richmond. Lots of speakers of interest with a special emphasis on native plants. For more information, <https://www.lewisginter.org/event/winter-symposium-cvnla/>

Let’s Talk Gardens series, Smithsonian Institution, Zoom presentations, FREE, noon – 1pm, register here: <https://gardens.si.edu/learn/lets-talk-gardens/>

February 10, Thursday, “Growing Native Edibles”, Dr. Nadia Navarrete-Tindal, Lincoln University of Missouri

February 17, Thursday, “Seed Starting at Home”, Cindy Brown, Horticulturist/Educator, Smithsonian

February 24, Thursday, “Celebrating Two Centuries of Beatrix Farrand”, Jonathan Kavalier, Director of Gardens and Grounds, Dumbarton Oaks

February 14, Monday, 1:30pm. Enjoy your lunch and join members of the Upper James River Chapter of the VA Native Plant Society to talk about planting combinations of native plants via Zoom. Contact Jan Smith for the Zoom registration, janhuntersmith@gmail.com

February 19, Saturday, 11am – noon. RAMGA Online Plant Clinic. “Feeding Birds Naturally”. What do birds need and when? How do I know what plants are good for birds? How do I garden with these bird friendly plants? Register for the Zoom presentation on the home page of www.ramga.org

February 21, Monday, 3pm – 4:30pm. Piedmont Master Gardeners Spring Lecture Series: “Learn How to Start Flowers and Vegetable Seeds Indoors”. Zoom presentation. For more information: <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/events/>

March 3, Thursday, 7- 8:15pm, Virtual presentation by Colston Burrell, sponsored by the Piedmont Master Gardeners, “Beauty, Integrity, and Resilience – Can a Garden Have Everything?” \$10. Register here: <https://piedmontmastergardeners.org/events/c-colston-burrell-beauty-integrity-and-resilience-can-a-garden-have-everything/>

March 5, Saturday, 9:15 – 11:35 and Saturday, March 12, 9:15 – 11:35. Bedford Master Gardeners annual symposium, “Grow the Good Life” via Zoom. \$18 for each weekend, \$36 for the entire presentation. March 5 presentations: “Gardening in a Chaotic Climate”, “Plants You Can Eat and Drink” and March 12 presentations: “Gardening Simplified: Plants and Design

Solutions for Time-Pressed and Maturing Gardeners” and “Good Weeds: Bad Weeds: What You Should Know About the Plant You Didn’t Plant”. Register here:

<https://www.bedfordareamastergardeners.org/event/grow-the-good-life/>

March 12, Saturday, Gardening in the Valley Symposium, 8:00 am – 4:00 pm, Hester Auditorium, Hester Hall, Shenandoah University, Winchester, VA. “Attracting Beneficial Pollinators”, Carrie Whitacre of Blandy Farm, State Arboretum of VA; Berenice Thieblot, “Reclamation of a Quarry”, “Growing Minds – School Gardens”, teachers Jennifer Horn and Christina Pezzimenti; “Role of Natural Remedies in Pet Health Care”, Dr. Wendell Combest; “Educational Public Gardens”, Perry Matthewes, Deputy Director, Museum of the Shenandoah Valley. \$65. Includes lunch and breaks. To register or for more information, contact www.nsvmg.org/events/symposium/

March 16, Wednesday, 8:00 – 4:00 pm, Roanoke Tree Health Care Workshop, sponsored by Trees Virginia. Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke. www.treesvirginia.org

March 18, Friday, Shenandoah Valley Plant Symposium 2022, 8:00 am – 4:15 pm, Best Western Inn and Conference Center, Waynesboro, VA. Speakers include Carol Reese on native plants, Paul Westervelt on new perennial introductions, Scott Beuerlein on survivor trees, and Marie Butler on designing for wildlife. \$95 registration includes lunch. Contact <https://www.waynesboro.va.us/971/Shenandoah-Valley-Plant-Symposium> for registration and/or more information.

FEBRUARY GARDEN TIPS

- Once it starts to warm up a bit towards the end of the month, start cutting back the hellebore foliage.
- Having problems with deer browse (aren’t we all!)? Check this out from Virginia Tech Extension:

<https://mgnv.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/HORT%E2%80%9062%E2%80%90-PDF.pdf>

- Finish up your seed orders and inventory leftover seeds.
- Develop your vegetable garden plan.
- Trim back dormant ornamental grasses.
- Sharpen garden tools.
- Take that mower to be serviced before the mad rush in the spring.
- Force some flowering branches (see p.11)
- Start broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and lettuce seeds indoors.

Winter is the time to prune many trees and shrubs. Use these handy pruning calendars from Virginia Tech Extension:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-462/430-462_pdf.pdf

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-461/430-461_pdf.pdf

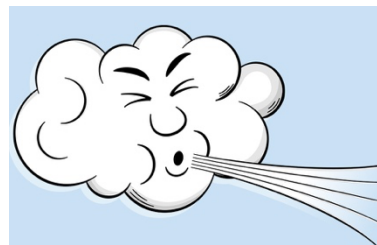
https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/430/430-460/430-460_pdf.pdf

Winds of Change

By Dave Bryer

Effects On Our Landscapes and Gardens- RAMGA

- Wind Trends
- Wind -- Why It's a Problem and How to Reduce Its Impacts
- Wind Effects on Plant Growth
- Windbreak Plants/Structures



There's nothing like a *Summer Breeze* against your face to cool the hot days and help you enjoy watching the trees and bushes *Blowin' in the Wind*. Breezes help plant propagation and reduce risk of fungus in plants. But wind also can cause plants to struggle *Against the Wind*. *Wind Beneath my Wings* allows birds to soar effortlessly but challenges young trees and fragile growth to stay upward. Pollen and *Dust in The Wind* is also a problem for gardeners as weeds and other invasives enter our landscapes. So, the question is: How do we fight back *Against the Wind*? This summary provides the reader with wind weather trends in the face of climate change and how to adapt and mitigate wind effects.

Wind Trends in Virginia:

Is it windier than it used to be?

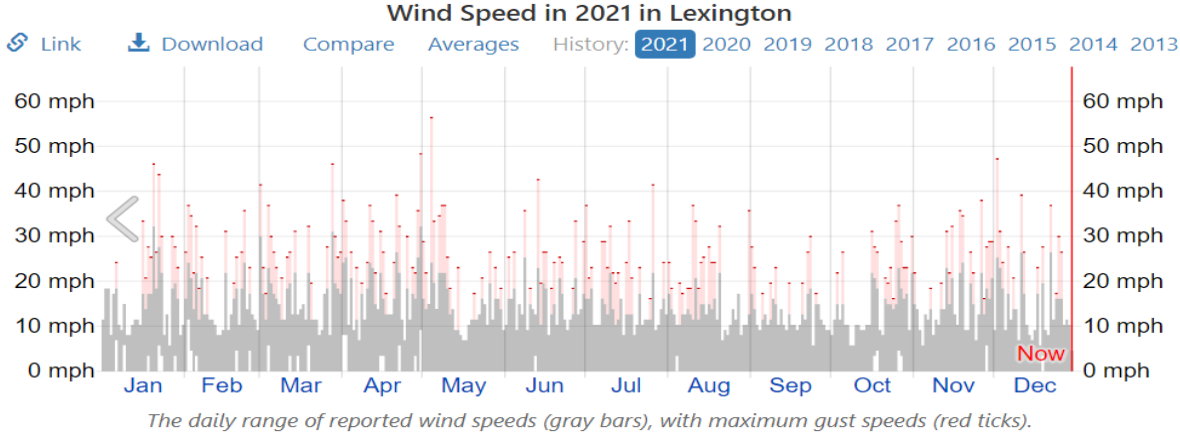
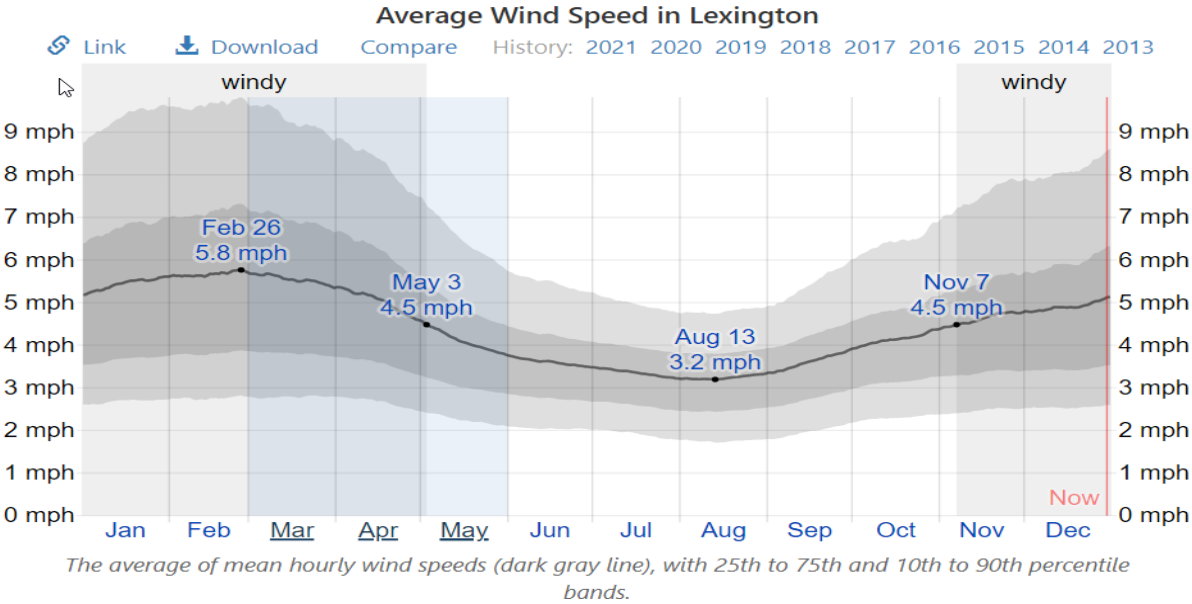
The bottom line is, it has been scientifically proven that **it is indeed windier than it used to be**. According to *National Geographic*, it is 5% windier than it used to be. And during storms, the winds are 10% stronger. A study published in the journal "Nature Climate Change" finds that winds across much of North America, Europe and Asia have been growing faster since about 2010. According to *Scientific American*, in less than a decade, the global average wind speed has increased from about 7 mph to **about 7.4 mph**. The main cause of wind is **differential heating, (the difference in temperature between different areas)**. The impact of global warming on surface wind speeds is an active area of research.

The trend in increasing wind speed has been on the upswing since 2010. Winds in Rockbridge County are complicated due to hilly and mountainous terrain and houses and landscaping placed in elevated areas, but it appears winds are increasing in our area, as well.

Persistent strong winds occur especially in the winter when temperatures fluctuate between mild and severe. Combined cold temperatures and strong winds cause more severe damage to plants. This makes protecting plants with wind breaks and mulch more critical.

The wind charts below show average wind speeds and peak wind gusts for Lexington. Wind gusts over 20 and 30 mph are common, and gusts as high as 50 and 60 mph do occur. These winds can be damaging to plants and trees. Regardless of the data trends, it is a fact that we, as Master Gardeners, must deal with windy conditions-that adversely affect our plants. This is especially true for gardeners and landowners at hilltop and higher elevations.

These graphs illustrate the number of wind gusts ranging from 20-55 mph occurring ~ 150/year in 2021, as well as average wind speeds for Lexington. These wind gusts can damage plant/tree growth.



Why Wind is a Problem and How to Reduce its Impacts:

Strong winds are especially hard on young plants and trees, making it difficult for them to grow successfully in very windy places. Some air movement is good for plants (it helps reduce disease or assists in pollination), but persistent or strong winds are detrimental to plant health. Persistent winds can compromise plant health. For example, steady high winds cause plants to close their leaf pores (called “stomata,” which serve to reduce water loss). Closing these pores also limits the plants’ ability to breathe, slowing growth (and your harvests) by 50% or more. Wind chill factor heightens the effects of cold: 20 degrees F with a 40-mph wind is as chilling as -10 degrees with a 5-mph wind. Wind-whipped plants can suffer root damage, and wind can blow blossoms off and retard growth due to wind chill. Wind will also make containers dry out faster, adding more stress to your plants. Strong winds can physically damage plants. Stems can snap and leaves and flowers may be ripped off, causing trauma to both the plant and gardener.

So, what can be done to reduce the effects of wind? Consider these four options:

1. Use wind breaks or shelters (ex: ring or wire mesh with burlap, slatted fencing, and plant wind breaks).
2. Tie up plants and adjust watering.
3. Mulch plants generously for root protection.
4. Choose plants and trees that are better adapted to windy conditions.

Windbreak Plants/Structure:

Wind break structures such as slatted fencing or plantings of lower bushes and higher trees can mitigate wind effects. Planting the right plants obviously is important, and you should choose plants hardy in our Virginia climate that can also serve as wind breaks.

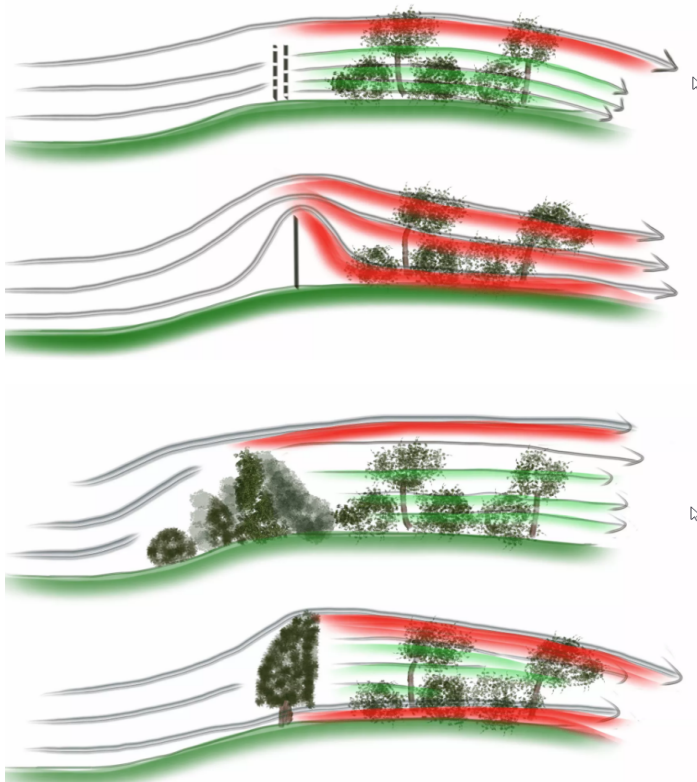
Here is a list of shrubs and trees that are better capable of handling windy conditions and, in some cases, can serve as wind blocks:

- Redbud
- Beech
- Dogwood
- Crepe Myrtle
- Bayberry
- American Holly
- Viburnum
- Bald Cypress
- Spruce
- Douglas Fir
- Sweet and Black Gum
- American Arborvitae
- Serviceberry
- Indian Hawthorne
- Juniper
- Euro Hornbeam
- Red Cedar
- Common Privet



American Holly (Ilex opaca)

Examples of wind break structures:



Windbreaks using slatted fencing rather than solid fencing work best, slowing down and breaking up the wind. Solid fencing causes a down draft which can increase wind speed.

Planting bushes upwind, then trees, creates an effective wind break by pushing the wind up and over gardens and low landscaping.

Conclusion: As our climate continues to change and present challenges to all plant lovers, Master Gardeners need to be able to adapt to these changes, continue to learn, and spread the word on how to deal with these, you could say, new opportunities. It's what we do...deal with the challenges and "Keep on Growing." The answer really is *Blowin' In the Wind*.

References:

1. *How Does Wind Affect The Growth of Plants*, "New York Botanical Gardens," 2021.
2. *How to Deal with Windy Gardens*, "Plant Plots," The Plotting Shed Blog, 2021.
3. *Best Plants for Windbreaks*, www.learningwiththeexperts.com, 2015.
4. *10 Shrubs for Windy Gardens*, www.monrovia.com, 2021.
5. *Wind- Why it's a Problem and How to Reduce Its Impact*, <https://verticalveg.org.uk/growing-in-the-wind>, 2017.
6. *Are Winds Speeding Up?*, "Scientific American," 2019.
7. *Best Wind Resistant Trees and Shrubs*, gardeningchannel.com, 2018.
8. *Wind Resistant Plants for Gardens*, gardeningknowhow.com, 2020.
9. Wind Gusts and Wind Speed Data and Graphs from: weatherspark.com, 2021.
10. *Global Wind Patterns and the Vulnerability of Wind Dispersed Species to Climate Change*, "Nature Climate Change," 2020.

The Joy of Seed Catalogs

By Karen Carlton

I realize that the title of this article may not arouse any excitement in looking at seed catalogs. To an avid gardener such as myself, it is pure heaven! When it is cold, damp, snowy and the outdoor garden looks deader than a door nail. That is when the gardener in me begins. I put my feet up on the couch and enjoy the fire in the fireplace. Immediately I dream of the beautiful garden that I will create as I read. The luscious veggies just waiting to be planted and the herbs wanting to be put in the ground. Please don't get me started on the millions of flowers just begging to be planted in my garden. I may sound a little off the edge to you, but the fact that I don't have my hands in dirt and pulling weeds does make me a little stir-crazy.

The two seed catalogs that I really enjoy looking at are Territorial Seed Company and Johnny Selected Seeds. Yes, in the past, I have spent hours reading and rereading about the various seeds and flowers I would like to plant and have growing in my garden. The reality is time, money, and most importantly

space. Eventually, I have to curb the seeds I get and to know where I will plant them. In the end it is a wonderful gardening trip, and you don't have to leave the comfort of your own home.

I leave you with this thought: Dream big; Be realistic about what is possible; And sleep well.

A selection of seed catalogs used by Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners:

[Seed Savers Exchange](#) (Decorah, Iowa)

[Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds](#) (Mansfield, Mo.)

[Burpee Seeds and Plants](#) (Warminster, Pa.)

[Territorial Seed Company](#) (Cottage Grove, Ore.)

[Seeds of Change](#) (Rancho Dominguez, Calif.)

[Ferry-Morse Seed Company](#) (Fulton, Ky.)

[Southern Exposure Seed Exchange](#) (Mineral, Va.)

[High Mowing Organic Seeds](#) (Wolcott, Vt.)

[Fedco Seeds](#) (Waterville, Maine)

[Nichols Garden Nursery](#) (Albany, Ore.)

[The Cook's Garden](#) (Warminster, Pa.)

[Botanical Interests](#) (Broomfield, Colo.)

[Renee's Garden Seeds](#) (Felton, Calif.)

[Peaceful Valley Farm & Garden Supply](#) (Grass Valley, Calif.)

[Johnny's Selected Seeds](#) (Winslow, Maine)

[Kitchen Garden Seeds](#) (Bantam, CT)

[Select Seed](#) (primarily flower seed including lots of heirlooms) (Union, Ct.)

[Floret Flowers](#) (Mt. Vernon, Wash.)

[Toadshade](#) (Frenchtown, NJ) (native seeds and plants)

[Prairie Nursery](#) (Westfield, WI) (native seeds and plants)

[Prairie Moon](#) (Winona, MN) (native seeds and plants)

Some great links for starting seeds:

https://www.pubs.ext.vt.edu/content/dam/pubs_ext_vt_edu/426/426-001/426-001.pdf

<https://extension.psu.edu/seed-starting-demystified>

<https://extension.wvu.edu/lawn-gardening-pests/gardening/gardening-101/seed-starting>

VEGETABLES...

Here are some Rockbridge Area Master Gardener recommendations for various vegetable cultivars and their sources for seed:

Karen Lyons – ‘Juliet’ tomatoes, ‘Amish Paste’ tomatoes, ‘Wisconsin Picklers’ and ‘Lunchbox’ cucumbers

Dave Bryer – ‘Asparabest’, ‘Spartacus Hybrid’, ‘Giant Jersey’ asparagus

Ginger Reed – ‘Merveille des Quatre Saisons’ lettuce, ‘Lacinato’ Kale, ‘Calima’ bean

This from **Katherine Smith**: I continue to grow 2 varieties of cucumbers to avoid disease/insect problems in our area. Both are climbers. My first choice is always a hybrid- ‘County Fair’, which is resistant to bacterial wilt, in particular. It is available from Jung Seeds & Plants

My 2nd choice is ‘Poona Kheera’, a heritage cuke from India. I have successfully grown this one in all 3 of its color stages: At finger size is a crisp, mostly white snacker. At middle size, it’s a golden yellow slicer. If you like to cook curries and such, the fully mature is then use. Disease resistance is good, too. Seeds are available from Southern Exposure Seed Exchange and Seed Savers Exchange.

I’ve grown many varieties of Okra over the years, and now, in a smaller garden, will be growing only one this season. The variety ‘Evertender’ lives up to its name. A spineless version, plants in our climate zone may be 5 ft tall, with pods which stay tender longer than most other varieties. This, too, is from India, where the pods are called ladyfingers! I’ve found they freeze nicely. Also available from Southern Exposure Seed Exchange.

Susan Piepho also likes ‘Juliet’ tomatoes (as do !!)

Anita Tuttle – ‘Drunken Woman’ leaf lettuce, ‘Dad’s Sunset and ‘Old German’ tomatoes, ‘Blue Clorage’ dent corn. Southern Exposure Seed Exchange

Karen Carlton and Molly McCluer – ‘Cherokee Purple’ tomatoes. Territorial Seeds

Saundra Martis – ‘Celebrity’ tomatoes. Johnny’s Seeds

Jan Smith and Petra Visscher – ‘Robin’s Koginut’ squash. Row 7 Seeds

And some of my favorites (**Faith**): ‘Tanja’ cucumber, ‘Honey Nut’ butternut squash, ‘Tamara’ pole flat beans. John Scheepers Kitchen Garden Seeds

A BIT OF SPRING IN FEBRUARY

By Faith Vosburgh

After a truly awful January, weatherwise, we deserve a bit of spring hopefulness. One way to get that is to force some flowering branches to bloom indoors. Flowering trees and shrubs set their buds the previous fall and need at least eight weeks of cold outdoor weather to be candidates for forcing. I usually try to force branches from mid to late February, depending on the weather.

The easiest plants to force are from the trees and shrubs that bloom the earliest. Think Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*), Forsythia, Witch hazel, and any of the Willows. By mid-February or so, try Flowering Quince (*Chaemomeles sp.*), my favorite shrub to force. I have red ones, a white one and a beautiful tangerine-colored one. Single branches of Flowering Quince often go for about \$25 at florists. The local common name for this quince is “japonica”. As an aside, when we had The Potting Shed in Lexington, it took me forever to realize locals when asking for a japonica shrub were referring to quince. A little research showed me that probably much of the older quince growing in the Rockbridge area is probably *Chaemomeles japonica*, a species that has been replaced in the trade by *Chaemomeles x superba*, a cross between *C. speciosa* and *C. japonica*). Mystery solved. In March, try forcing Bridal Veil spirea, Honeysuckle shrub (*Diervilla sp.*), and Lilacs.



There are a number of tree branches that will force well. The flowers on the red maple and the Japanese maples are beautiful and force fairly quickly, usually in two weeks. The catkins on alders and birches look wonderful in arrangements and apple, crabapple, and cherry tree branches are always lovely.

Directions: On a sunny day, cut branches at least 12” in length with a sterilized (rubbing alcohol works well) sharp pair of pruners. Pay attention to the tree/shrub and be careful when cutting that you don’t

mar the shape. Look for branches with lots of flower buds. Flower buds are rounder than leaf buds and you may often see a strip of color at the tip of the bud. Bring the branches inside and immediately place in a bucket of warm water, or even better, submerge the branches in water in a bathtub overnight. This helps the stem to break dormancy. Don't smash the stems; instead, cut several slits in the bottom of the stem. Keep the branches in a bucket of water in a cool area with bright indirect light. If it is too warm, say, in a sunny window, many of the buds will not open properly. Mist occasionally and change the water every three days or so and you will have that breath of spring before you know it!

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Rockbridge Area Master Gardeners, www.ramga.org

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