

Leaflet

A MASSACHUSETTS HORTICULTURAL SOCIETY PUBLICATION

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Coaxing Branches Into Bloom for Home Color or BLOOMS!

by Betty Sanders
Lifetime Master Gardener

It's winter in New England for far too long. Spring flowers appear in the markets, but what about our own gardens? We can't change the weather, but we can start our garden blooming indoors.

If you are intrigued by the idea of entering horticulture in Blooms! at the upcoming Boston Flower & Garden Show, but you just aren't a houseplant person, there are two categories that may be perfect for you: cut specimens blooming outdoors naturally and cut specimens forced into bloom. Your flowering trees and shrubs could send you home with a blue ribbon even as your plants shiver in late March cold.

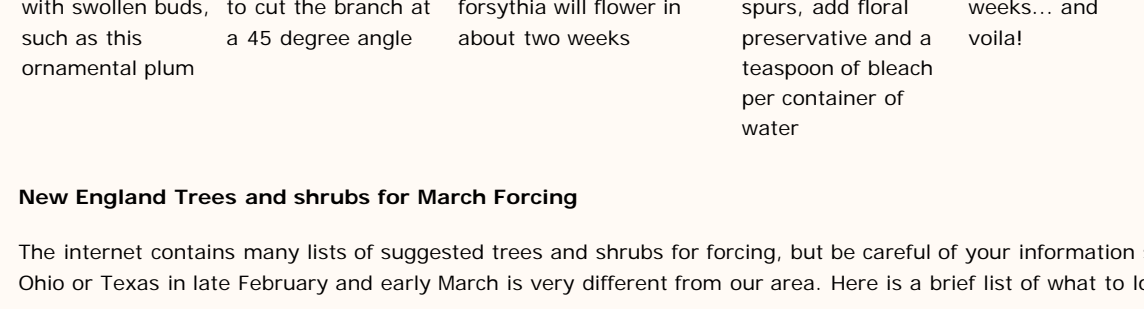
Forcing, or as I prefer, coaxing plants into bloom is wonderful way to start the season early. Late winter is the best time to prune many branches, but when we prune our spring flowering plants we lose some of the flowers. If you combine your selective pruning with forcing the branches, you get to enjoy the flowers over a longer season.

To coax branches into bloom for Blooms!, you must begin by counting backwards from the entry date—March 22—anywhere two to five weeks depending on what you are forcing. Choose a day when the temperature is above freezing and look for branches that have lots of plump flower buds (these are larger than the leaf buds). Because the timing of a forced bloom is never 100% predictable, give yourself second and third chances by cutting branches on several days to allow for shorter or longer forcing periods. Because you are pruning a blooming plant, you will want to do so with extra care in order to assure that the "outdoor" bloom that follows is not sacrificed. Start by looking at crossing branches or those that may rub against another branch.

The branches you are going to force should be less than one-half inch in diameter. When you've chosen the branches, cut them with sharp clippers and bring them inside. There you need to clean off any low side branches that might interfere with using them in a vase. Place the branches in a bucket or other container (the deeper the better) to hold them upright.

Re-cut the stems on a 45° angle, providing more surface area for taking up water. Then place them into three inches of warm (100°) water. Wait a few minutes and then fill the container as high up the stems as possible with water to which a floral preservative has been added. Also add a teaspoon of chlorine bleach to prevent bacteria growth. Keep the container in a cool, somewhat shaded location. I have often kept the branches in an unheated garage or basement. Imitate spring with high humidity by misting the branches. Do not let the water level fall.

When the buds show color, it's time to move them into the house, but out of direct sunlight and away from heat sources. Re-cut the ends and provide fresh water with preservatives. To keep the flowers lasting longer, return them to a cooler location each night. If your branches are show worthy, remember they cannot exceed 30 inches in length or width for entry into the show. Go to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society website (www.MassHort.org) and click on Blooms! for a complete set of Horticulture rules and entry date and times.



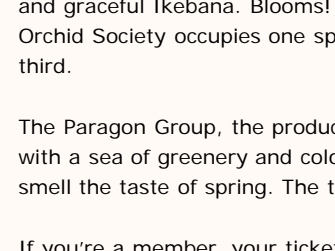
- Look for branches with swollen buds, such as this ornamental plum
- Use bypass pruners to cut the branch at a 45 degree angle
- Forced indoors, this forsythia will flower in about two weeks
- Trim off lower spurs, add floral preservative and a teaspoon of bleach per container of water
- Wait a few weeks... and voilà!

New England Trees and shrubs for March Forcing

The internet contains many lists of suggested trees and shrubs for forcing, but be careful of your information source. What may be in bud in Ohio or Texas in late February and early March is very different from our area. Here is a brief list of what to look for:

Trees/shrubs	Weeks to force	What you'll get
Cornelian Dogwood	2	Dainty, yellow flowers in clusters
Cornus mas		
Deutzia	5	White flowers
<i>Deutzia gracilis</i>		
Flowering Quince	4	Long lasting, red or orange flowers
<i>Chaenomeles sp.</i>		
Forsythia	2	Many yellow flowers
<i>Forsythia x intermedia</i>		
Pussy Willow	2	Fuzzy, white buds
<i>Salix sp.</i>		
Red twig Dogwood	5	White flowers with red stems
<i>Cornus sericea</i>		
Shadblow	2	Dainty, white flowers
<i>Amelanchier sp.</i>		
Vernal Witchhazel	2	Four, yellow, fork-shaped petals
<i>Hamamelis vernalis</i>		
Ornamental Cherry or Plum	3	White or pink flowers in clusters
<i>Prunus sp.</i>		
Crabapple	4	White, pink, or red flowers in clusters. Single-flowering forces easier than double.
<i>Malus sp.</i>		
Flowering Dogwood	5	Large, white, long-lasting flowers
<i>Cornus florida</i>		
Magnolia	5	Large, creamy-white to deep red flowers.
<i>Magnolia sp.</i>		
Redbud	2	Dark branches: small, magenta-pink flowers
<i>Cercis canadensis</i>		

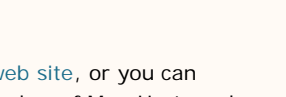
Last Chance for Tickets with Membership



The Boston Flower & Garden Show opens March 24. If your membership is current as of March 15, you're going to the show as our guest.

And what a show it's going to be... thirty gardens, hundreds of garden-themed vendors, five days of lectures and demonstrations. Oh...and Blooms!

Blooms!, produced by MassHort, will be located in the Seaport World Trade Center's beautiful conference center. There, you'll find two stunning floral design competitions, plant society displays, amateur horticulture competition, and graceful Ikebana. Blooms! even spills out onto the main Flower Show floor in the form of three exhibits. The Orchid Society occupies one space, three terrific plant rooms a second, and a vignette of Weezy's Garden the third.



The Paragon Group, the producer of the Boston Flower & Garden Show, is filling the Seaport World Trade Center with a sea of greenery and color – the perfect respite for a winter that has been long on cold weather and short on sun. You'll see, feel and smell the taste of spring. The theme of the show? 'A Feast for the Senses'. It couldn't be more appropriate.

If you're a member, your tickets will be mailed to you in the next two weeks (February 19th - March 10).

If you're not a member, you have just until March 10th to act. You can join online using our [secure membership web site](#), or you can [download a membership application here](#). Either way, there are lots of great reasons to support and become a member of MassHort, and one compelling reason to do it today!

If you would like to see all of the great benefits of becoming a MassHort member, [visit our membership page](#).

'Gardening Essentials' Set for March 25 at the Boston Flower & Garden Show

The Boston Flower & Garden Show will be open for five days next month, but if you can go for just one day, perhaps you'll want to circle Thursday, March 25. That's the day you can not only see all the landscape exhibits, floral displays, amateur horticulture and shop the vendors, but also hear a day of exciting talks inspired by the theme of 'Gardening Essentials':

When MassHort was invited by the flower show's producer, the Paragon Group, to program a full day of lectures, there was no dearth of ideas for talks. What quickly emerged, though, was the idea of bringing together eight speakers who know a lot about their subject and who have a reputation for knowing how to connect with an audience.

A lot of thought went into the day's topics. Here's what MassHort came up with and the speakers they chose:

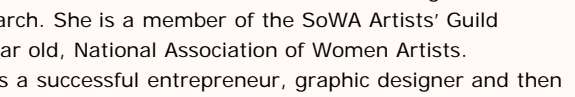
- 11:30 am:** Art Scarpa opens the morning with 'The Care and Feeding of Houseplants'. Whether we live in a grand house or a one-bedroom apartment, houseplants are an essential part of New England because six months out of the year there's nothing growing and green outside. This program will deal with houseplant basics: selection, care and maintenance. You will come away with your thumb considerably greener.
Art Scarpa is one of the most knowledgeable houseplant experts in New England. He raises succulents and cacti in his Reading, MA, greenhouse.
- 12:30 pm:** MassHort has assembled on stage a virtual encyclopedia of gardening knowledge. Roger Swain, Paul Miskovsky and Kerry Ann Mendez invite everyone to bring their best questions on any topic related to gardening. Swain is the well-known host of PBS' 'The Victory Garden' (he will also speak on the subject of tools on Saturday), who brings a dollop of humor to his broad knowledge of all things botanical. Miskovsky is considered one of the region's best landscapers. He has installed two gardens on the exhibit floor: one, a 1,080 square foot garden (Falmouth-based Miskovsky Landscaping) and a second one for Heritage Museum and Gardens. Paul creates inspiring gardens for his public and private clients, but he can also tell you how to properly plant a rhododendron. Mendez is a 'passionate perennialist', an exceptional gardening speaker and the proprietor of 'Perennially Yours' in upstate New York.
- 1:30 pm:** Rita Wollmering offers 'Ready, Set, Grow - Preparing for a Successful Vegetable Garden'. She'll take you through the practical steps that lead to a more successful vegetable garden. With planning, preparation and smart planting, gardeners can see an increase in both the health and yield of their plots.
Rita is the proprietor of The HERB FARMacy, a ten-acre certified organic farm and plant nursery in Salisbury, MA. She is a well-known speaker on the garden club circuit and enjoys sharing practical tips with gardeners of all experience levels.
- 2:30 pm:** Betty Sanders talks on 'The Green, Organic and Affordable Lawn'. The level of hype and dubious information about 'organics' has gotten to a state where someone with a wide body of knowledge, no axe to grind and nothing to sell is needed to sort it all out and answer all questions in a way that listeners understand their options.
Betty is just the right person to talk intelligently in the subject. Well known to Leaflet readers for her monthly 'Horticultural Hints' column, she's a Massachusetts Master Gardener with a degree in organic chemistry and a well-respected garden speaker. Her own lawn in Medfield is organic, low maintenance and looks beautiful.
- 3:30 p.m.:** Cathy Felton will talk on 'Editing the Mature Garden'. What do you do with a yard full of overgrown shrubs and perennials with dead centers? It may be the house you've lived in for 40 years or it may be the one you just purchased. Either way, bringing a landscape back to a manageable shape doesn't always need to be a job for a contractor – or pointlessly expensive. The program will show how incremental steps can undo decades of neglect.
Cathy is a noted Wenham, MA, garden consultant and speaker with a strong interest in both native plants and organic gardening practices.
- 5 p.m.:** Sally Muspratt offers 'Small is Beautiful: Do-it-Yourself City Landscaping'. Not everyone has five acres, not everyone can hire a designer. The house in the city with 50 feet of street frontage can have just as much appeal as an estate. But where do you begin when you're starting with some old boxwood and scraggly grass? This talk will take homeowners on a step-by-step process toward achieving a great landscape in a small space.
Sally is a landscape designer in West Roxbury with numerous public and private urban gardens in the Boston area on her resume. She holds a graduate certificate in landscape design from Radcliffe College, among other distinctions. She is consistently identified as one of the most widely admired speakers at area garden clubs.

Local artist supports MassHort through art showing

Local artist Joanne Tarlin will be exhibiting her extraordinary art at the Wellesley Free Library from March 6th through March 30th. She has generously agreed to provide an individual membership to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society with the purchase of any of artworks at the show. Below is a press release regarding the exhibit.

Fine Artist Joanne Tarlin Exhibits
OF a Powerful Nature

20 dynamic & sensual paintings*
At the Wellesley Free Library during the month of March.



A percentage of all sales will be donated to the Wellesley Free Library and buyers will receive an individual membership to the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.

Meet the Artist, Reception
Saturday, March 6th, 9am-12 noon

WHO: Joanne Tarlin is a graduate of The Otis Art Institute of Parsons School of Design, a Division of The New School for Social Research. She is a member of the SoWA Artists' Guild in Boston as well as the prestigious 120 year old, National Association of Women Artists. Prior to painting professionally, Joanne was a successful entrepreneur, graphic designer and then a creative director. In 2004, she began to focus once again on her passion for painting. Joanne now paints full-time at her studio in Boston. Her work is in corporate and private collections.

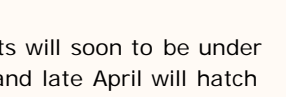
WHAT: Smell the pine, hear the rush of a wave cresting, transcend reality and absorb the female spirit that pervades these contemporary oil paintings. Each one, inspired by nature: glaciers, woodlands, coral reefs and other wonders, is strongly composed and a visual delight of colors, patterns and texture. Additionally, many are commentaries on the state of our environment, such as Glacier Melting Too Fast and Save the Coral Reefs.

WHERE: The Wellesley Free Library, Wakelin Room
530 Washington Street, Wellesley MA 02482-5989, (781) 237-0485

WHEN: On display through March 30th.

Winter Interest at Elm Bank

Gardens aren't just for spring and summer. While the perennials at Elm Bank rest under a snow cover, there are elements of the gardens that come alive at this time of year. One example can be seen in the Bressingham Garden where a trio of sals. 'Flame' glows reddish-orange with subtle streaks of gold against their white backdrop. These same sals (members of the salicaceae, or willow family) will be adorned with four-inch-long, dark green leaves in the spring and summer, turning golden yellow in the fall. The nearby tree is a piece 'Pendula'.



Late February/March Horticultural Hints

by Betty Sanders
Lifetime Master Gardener

It's almost March which means it's almost time to start watching for the flower buds swell on the trees and shrubs. It's definitely time to cut some branches for indoor forcing, and perhaps to enter in the Flower Show (see the nearby article).

The ground is still frozen but planning your 2010 garden should be well underway. Your flower and vegetable seed order should be arriving soon. Check the packet for advice on when to start seeds. Starting them too early often leads to leggy or weak seedlings from having spent too long waiting indoors for warm weather to arrive. Use only sterile soil mixes to prevent damping off of seedlings.

Take a walk around your yard (staying off frozen ground) and enjoy the earliest flowers. Witch Hazels (Hamamelis) are in bloom and cornelian dogwood (Cornus mas) are close behind. As snow cover gives way look for hellebore blooms to put in an appearance along with the early bulbs such as snowdrops, Siberian squills and crocus.

If you had a lovely blizzard of moths last November or December around your outdoor lights, your plants will soon be under attack. That blizzard was winter moths — an unwanted invader of our land -- who between mid-March and late April will hatch from eggs laid in the bark and crawl into the leaf buds of many of our trees. Once there, safe from any pesticides we may spray on them, they will chew away at the new leaves. They seem to particularly favor oak, maple and fruit trees but will eat almost anything they encounter including roses and perennials. After the leaf buds open, the mature caterpillars will spin threads and be spread further by the wind. Appropriately timed sprays can reduce their number and the damage to your plants. Contact a state-certified arborist to spray your trees particularly if they have been weakened by infestations in the past years. For more information about treatment for winter moths, see [this article](#).

Your houseplants should have awakened from their winter slumber. If you haven't already, begin fertilizing to feed the new growth. Don't forget to keep the humidity up with misting or pebble trays—our homes remain very dry as long as the heating systems are on.

Your best plants deserve to be shown at the Boston Flower and Garden Show. There's a category for almost every plant in your home. Take a look at the [Amateur Horticulture entry list](#) under Blooms! on MassHort's website and start primping. A careful cleanup, from washing leaves with warm water to removing imperfect leaves and errant dirt and debris, is the path to a shiny ribbon. Entry day is March 22, 12 noon to 8 p.m. at the Seaport World Trade Center.

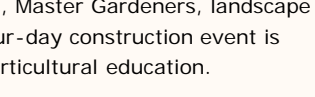
Flower Show Fever

by Neal Sanders
Leaflet Contributor

It was about noon last Tuesday that I realized I'm getting too old for this stuff. But then Paul Miskovsky yelled over to me and asked if I could give a hand pulling out a birch tree by its root ball. Of course I helped. And then I pulled out two more birches. After that, I moved rocks for an hour.

At least I got a meal time special and great pizza for my efforts. Oh, and a top-drawer horticultural design seminar.

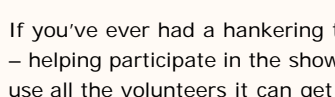
The Boston Flower & Garden Show you'll see walking through the Seaport World Trade Center next month will be the product of a lot of very talented people channeling their knowledge of horticulture and landscape design into a few hundred square feet of eye-pleasing color and form. Assisting that talent are the efforts of several hundred people who, over the course of three or four days, physically assemble those exhibits under the watchful eye of the designer.



The t-shirt I earned for my efforts.

For the past four years, I've been part of crews that help build exhibits and otherwise set up for flower shows. My aching back and I are here to tell you that what looks so effortless when you admire a garden vignette from the aisles is anything but. It starts with a literal mountain of mulch and a stone or wooden frame (called a kickboard) that holds the mulch in place. Then, in go trees, shrubs, perennials, annuals, rocks, water and whatever else the exhibit's designer chooses to throw in.

Some exhibits are carefully designed months in advance with every tulip pre-positioned. But the best exhibits, in my opinion, are just ideas in the mind of the designer until he or she arrives at the flower show site with truckloads of plants. Designers start in December or January with a greenhouse full of material to be forced into leaf or bloom. In the week or so before the material is to be moved, the exhibitor goes through the greenhouse, looking to see which plants performed best. Those plants get loaded onto a heated truck and become the focal points of the exhibit. They're augmented by hundreds of annuals and perennials supplied by professional growers.

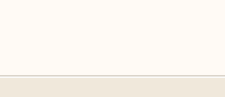


Paul Miskovsky

Landscape Paul Miskovsky has exhibits this year at both the Rhode Island Flower Show (where I worked last week), and at the Boston Flower & Garden Show in March. He invites friends, Master Gardeners, landscape students and even customers to help with the 'build', as the crash three- or four-day construction event is called. Along the way, he provides, in addition to the tee shirts and pizza, a horticultural education.

Paul also reserves the right to change his mind about things as the build progresses. When they were in the greenhouse, those three clump birches looked like they'd be in full leaf by the time the show opened. They were installed on the first day on the forks of a Bobcat. As things went in around them, their scant leaf coverage began to annoy Paul. Yesterday, the annoyance level reached full boil and the birches were yanked out by their two-hundred-pound root balls... by hand in order not to disturb completed parts of the exhibit in their place went in six huge pots of bamboo. The graceful bamboo in turn caused a dozen ikuochoe to be rearranged which meant half a dozen hosta were left homeless awaiting reassignment.

At 900 square feet, Paul's 'palette' in Rhode Island was large by that show's standard. For the Boston Flower and Garden Show, he expands to 1,080 square feet - 20% more space. He'll also oversee the building of a 600 square foot exhibit for the Heritage Museum and Gardens and a 240 square foot parcel for the Massachusetts Horticultural Society.



If you've ever had a hankering to get behind the scenes of a flower show — and you're not afraid to get your hands dirty — helping participate in the show set-up is a terrific way to see what happens before the curtain goes up. MassHort can use all the volunteers it can get for Blooms! Drop Vivien Bouffard, the volunteer coordinator, an email at volunteers@masshort.org.

Neal Sanders is a frequent contributor to the Leaflet. We encourage you to read his contributions to our In the Gardens Blog where he focuses on interesting cultivars that can found in the Elm Bank gardens. Neal's first novel, Murder Imperfect, has just been published. You can learn more about it here or order it through Amazon.com.

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About the Massachusetts Horticultural Society

Founded in 1829, the Massachusetts Horticultural Society is dedicated to encouraging the science and practice of horticulture and developing the public's enjoyment, appreciation, and understanding of plants and the environment.

