

Shrubs for Cut Stems

We hope that midsummer finds you and your garden well! After some time off to recover from the early summer planting rush, Garden News returns this week to introduce our latest collection, Ornamental Shrubs for Cut Stems. More substantial than perennials, but not quite trees, ornamental shrubs offer both structure and color in the landscape. We've chosen this particular group of good-looking woody plants because they are low maintenance, provide garden interest around the seasons, and do double duty as landscaping and cut stems.

Digging holes for more plantings may sound nutty when you're already trying to keep up with riotously blooming flower beds and abundant vegetable harvests (no, we don't need any more zucchinis just now, but thanks!). Once established, however, shrubs tend to be low maintenance, and fall is a good time for planting them so they get deeply watered and well-established over the winter. And we've picked dual-purpose plants, overachievers that not only brighten the landscape year round, but provide showy foliage, brilliant berries, long-lasting blooms, and/or colorful twigs, for a continuous supply of cut stems for fresh or dried arrangements.

Most shrubs do require a little work in the form of yearly or occasional pruning, but many like to be pruned immediately after flowering, so by cutting the bloom stems for decorative arrangements, you're also doing some of the work of pruning (though it's hardly "work" if you look at it this way). A few exceptions are Buddleia, Tamarix, Callicarpa, Symphoricarpus, and Ilex, which should be pruned when dormant, in late fall through early spring. For more detailed shrub pruning instructions, [see this guide](#) from the Colorado State University Extension.

We've arranged the list according to each plant's primary season of interest, so you can plan for a year-round display in the garden and the vase. Below are a few highlights (visit our [flowering shrub page](#) for a complete list and photos of the varieties we're offering).

Spring

Cut stem season begins in late winter, with big silky gray catkins like rabbits' feet appearing on the bare stems of Giant Pussy Willow (*Salix chaenomeloides*). The yellow-gold flowers of Forsythia 'Show Off,' snowy blooms of White Forsythia (*Abeliophyllum distichum*) and fragrant purple flowerheads of the 'Pocahontas' Lilac (*Syringa hyacinthiflora*) follow soon after.



Summer



The warm season ushers in the flamboyant conical blooms of 'Peacock' Butterfly Bush (*Buddleia*) and bright pink plumes of Tamarix 'Pink Cascade,' as well as the deeply colored foliage of Physocarpus 'Coppertina' and 'Summer Wine'.

Fall

A new late-blooming, very compact hydrangea series called 'Cityline' starts flowering in summer but its blossoms last on the plants through fall, changing slowly from bright pinks and reds to creamy chartreuse as they age. Or plan an autumn display of mixed ornamental berries with Callicarpa 'Early Amethyst' (dark purple), Symphoricarpos 'Amethyst' (soft magenta), and Viburnum 'Blue Muffin' (bright blue).

Winter

The dark red stems of Cornus 'Arctic Fire' and the scarlet-tipped yellow twigs of 'Arctic Sun' blaze away even through the gray, rainy winter months. 'Berry Nice' Winterberry (Ilex) drops its leaves in fall to better display its brilliant, shiny red berries through midwinter; 'Jim Dandy' produces few berries of its own but is needed to pollinate the showier female varieties.

And as the winterberries start to fade, you have pussy-willow catkins on the way again...

Most woody plants stay fresh longer if the lower stems are split and crushed so that they absorb water better. Condition them for longer by cutting in the morning and storing in the dark for a few hours in deep, slightly warm water with 7-up added or professional cut flower life extender.



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