



Growing Woody Ornamentals for Cut Stems

When the leaves begin to fall and the cold weather creeps in, many people think that the time for bringing outdoor beauty inside has ended. Winter, however, is the perfect time to introduce cuttings from outdoor woody ornamentals to your indoor space.

plant selection

When selecting plants to grow for woody cuts, look for species that:

- Have the ability to grow well in this climate and re-grow rapidly after severe and frequent pruning;
- Produce harvestable branches early in the plant's life;
- Produce numerous stems borne over a long period of time that are at least 18" long;
- Retain berries or foliage well;
- Have a long vase life.

Plant suggestions for the St. Louis area are listed on the next page.

get growing

Growing your own woody ornamentals to use for arrangements is similar to having a perennial cutting garden. In addition, they may be used as attractive landscape plants, as habitats for beneficial insects and birds, and as windbreaks. Once established, woody ornamentals are relatively easy to care for, with few pest or disease problems. Prepare your planting area as usual (see *Tree & Shrub Planting Guide*) but consider testing the soil and amending for adequate phosphorous which will help the plants produce the longer shoots you will need for your indoor decorating projects. If you want your woody ornamentals to serve as a windbreak or part of your landscape design, space them accordingly. If you are growing them specifically for cutting, however, tight spacing is better. Placing the plants in close proximity to each other forces the stems to grow long and straight, thereby making them easier to harvest and use for decorating. Remember that some berry-producing plants, such as holly (*Ilex spp.*), have separate male and female plants. A compatible male pollenizer will be needed or berries will not form.

maintenance

After planting, make sure to pay attention to your plant's watering needs, supplementing rainfall for the first few years, or until its root system is well established. Pruning to encourage the growth of many long stems differs from pruning for landscaping purposes. Pruning the apical bud (the growing tip) from the plant while it is small will cause the plant to branch low to the ground. This will help in the production of long stems that will be usable for cut stems. When pruning a larger, already established plant, you must cut it back hard to get a flush of long stems.

harvest

Some branches are chosen for their beauty simply as bare branches. Dogwood (*Cornus*) and willow (*Salix*) are good examples. Harvest the branches after the plant has gone dormant for the season, store or display them dry and they should last for several months. Branches chosen for their ornamental fruits, such as beautyberry (*Callicarpa*), winterberry (*Ilex verticillata*) and crabapple (*Malus*) should be harvested after the fruits have matured. The unattractive, dry foliage may be removed, and the branches stored or displayed wet. Evergreen branches, such as holly (*Ilex spp.*), boxwood (*Buxus*) and *Magnolia* may be harvested as needed and stored or displayed wet. Some of them will benefit with an anti-desiccant spray such as Wilt-Pruf.

display of woody ornamentals – indoors or out?

To keep them looking their best *indoors* for the longest period of time, mixed arrangements will need to be stored and displayed in water. Using florist's foam soaked in water will not only keep your branches looking great, but has the benefit of providing support to your arrangement. Water-absorbent granules, such as Soil Moist can also provide moisture and support.

Woody ornamentals are also a great way to dress up *outdoor* pots that were filled with summer annuals. After removing the spent plants from your pots, use the same potting mix as a base for your cut branches and twigs. Don't break up the soil because you will want a firm, compacted mix to support the branches. Start in the middle of the pot with your larger branches and move outward, adding the berry branches or smaller twigs until you are satisfied with the arrangement. An asymmetrical arrangement can also be chosen, with pine (*Pinus*) or red cedar (*Juniperus*) branches flowing over the sides. You could also start with empty pots and fill them with soil, sand or pea gravel as a base for your arrangements. If you are using resin or plastic pots, make sure that the pots are weighted down so they won't blow over. These pots will last throughout the winter, bringing a new dimension to your outdoor environment.

Botanical Name	Common Name	Comments
<i>Aronia spp.</i>	Chokeberry	Bright red fall foliage and inky black berries
<i>Betula spp.</i>	Birch	Classic white bark; harvest twigs and fallen peels of bark
<i>Buxus spp.</i>	Boxwood	Long-lasting foliage, some variegated; treat with Wilt-Pruf
<i>Callicarpa spp.</i>	Beautyberry	Fantastic purple or white berries; must be defoliated
<i>Celastrus scandens</i>	True Bittersweet Vine	Large, orange-red fall fruit on arching stems; may need pollinizer
<i>Cornus sanguinea</i> ; <i>C. alba</i> ; <i>C. sericea</i>	Bloodtwig, Red-twig & Yellow-twig Dogwood	Dried stems last for months; for best fall and winter color, cut plant back hard every year; sometimes needs to be defoliated
<i>Corylus avellana</i>	Contorted Filbert	Unusual twisty stems; prune judiciously
<i>Cotoneaster spp.</i>	Cotoneaster	Dense foliage is evergreen or turns red in fall; red or black berries
<i>Cupressus arizonica</i>	Arizona Cypress	Scented, pale blue evergreen; grows fast
<i>Euonymus spp.</i>	Burning Bush/Euonymus	Bright red fall color; rich brown winged stems; orange fruit
<i>Gaultheria</i>	Wintergreen	Glossy, fragrant foliage and bright red, edible berries
<i>Hamamelis</i>	Witch Hazel	Large autumn buds open to fragrant flowers in February
<i>Hydrangea spp.</i>	Hydrangea	Cut flowers when blooming; dry for wreaths and arrangements
<i>Hypericum spp.</i>	St. John's Wort	Interesting fall seed capsules; some are bright orange or pink
<i>Ilex spp.</i>	Holly (needs pollinizer)	Long-lasting evergreen branches, some variegated; red berries
<i>Ilex verticillata</i>	Winterberry (needs pollinizer)	Harvest stems when berries are mature; must be defoliated
<i>Juniperus spp.</i>	Red Cedar/Juniper	Strongly scented, long-lasting evergreen branches; dark blue berries
<i>Kerria</i>	Kerria	Lime green stems with a zigzag pattern; must be defoliated
<i>Magnolia grandifolia</i>	Evergreen Magnolia	Large, evergreen, leathery leaves for wreaths and arrangements
<i>Malus</i>	Crabapple	Showy, long-lasting fruit in various shades of orange and red
<i>Nandina</i>	Heavenly Bamboo	Airy, coppery-red foliage is semi-evergreen; sprays of red fruit
<i>Picea spp.</i>	Spruce	Stiff, multi-branched, long-lasting evergreen; treat with Wilt-Pruf
<i>Pinus spp.</i>	Pine	Fragrant, long-lasting evergreen branches; treat with Wilt-Pruf
<i>Poncirus</i>	Hardy Orange	Dense, twisting, thorny stems make a truly dramatic statement
<i>Rosa rugosa & others</i>	Rose	Large bright red and orange hips; burgundy or blue-green stems
<i>Salix spp.</i>	Coral, Curly & Pussy Willow	Also twisted, fan-tailed or red-bud varieties; must be defoliated
<i>Symphoricarpus</i>	Coral Berry	Vigorous shrub with large, lilac-pink fruit; takes well to pruning
<i>Thuja spp.</i>	Arborvitae	Durable, fluffy evergreen with a slight scent; treat with Wilt-Pruf