Mid February is a good time to collect forsythia branches for forcing blooms indoors. They are very common shrubs in the olive family and frequently found in the southeast. They are usually the first to bloom in early spring. If you don’t have access to one, keep your eyes peeled as many public spaces may have mature plants and are willing to share branches.



**Materials Needed:**

* Sharp pruning shears
* Water supply
* Large bucket with water to hold branches
* Individual bud vases
* Ribbons to tie around the vases
* Handout for residents with “facts about forsythia”

**Directions:**

A day prior to the activity, (pick a day that is above freezing), harvest your forsythia branches with sharp pruning shears.

1. Cut the forsythia stems in lengths of less than 3 feet, and put them in a bucket of warm water.
2. With your pruning shears, cut another inch off the bottoms of the submerged stems. This second cut, performed underwater where air cannot act as a drying agent, will promote water intake.
3. Allow the forsythia stems to soak up the warm water for several hours or overnight.
4. Take the stems to your activity in water and demonstrate how to re-cut the stems unwater.
5. To increase water intake, you can cut peel about an inch around the outer stem at the bottom. Keep under water when doing this.
6. Have each participant select a branch or two and place in a bud vase with water.
7. You can add some color for now by tying a colorful ribbon around the vase.
8. Remind the participants to keep the water filled and to watch daily for blooms. You'll speed up the forsythia flower forcing if you keep the stems in a high-humidity environment and give them some sun.

Encourage discussion about Forsythia by asking each resident if they ever grew a forsythia bush and to share their memories …

* "Forsythia flowers are yellow. They bloom in April for most of Southern States."
* "It's time to fertilize the lawn when the forsythia is flowering"
* "This plant can grow into a huge bush and can be pruned after it flowers to maintain a compact shape"
* “Sometimes planting in a row as a hedge to hide unsightly views”
* "I remember seeing these flowers when I walked to school in the spring"
* "They remind me of Easter time"
* "My husband had one in the garden"
* "I don't think they have a smell"

You may want to prepare a handout with pictures and facts about forsythias. Stress the magic of the bare brown branches turning into something beautiful. The anticipation of waiting for the blooms to open can create some excitement and anticipation for the residents.

Goals:

* Encourage social interaction
* Create a sense of anticipation and hope
* Recall memories
* Reminder of mystery and beauty of nature

source: <http://www.gardentherapynotes.com>