**Week of January 18, 1998**

**Enjoy an Inside Spring**

**Willie O. Chance III**

**Houston County Extension Agent**

**Have you noticed that some plants think it’s spring? Buds are swelling, some are popping open while others are in full bloom. It happens every year, but some plants seem to get ahead of the weather every year. They are constantly at risk to be frozen by late freezes. Why is this?**

**Many spring flowering plants form flower buds in late summer. These buds lie dormant until spring. They only bloom after they receive a certain number of hours of cold weather. Good examples of this include azalea, dogwood, spring flowering bulbs, and many fruits.**

 **Why do some plants bloom first every year? These are the ones that require less chilling than others. Their chilling requirement is met early in winter and when a warm spell arrives -- thei flowers ‘pop’ open.**

**In my neighborhood, quince, forsythia and narcissus are out now. Quince and forsythia are low chilling plants. The narcissus requires no cold weather to bloom. It can be planted in pots and will bloom indoors. Other bulbs will do this too. It is called force blooming.**

**Most spring flowering bulbs need a long period of cool temperatures before bloom. During this time the bulb grows roots and forms flower shoots inside the bulb.**

**Not all bulbs are easy to force blooming. Narcissus and hyacinths are easiest to force but you can also try tulips, crocus, daffodils, muscari and others.**

**Select large, firm bulbs without mold, cuts or bruises. Plant them in sterile potting soil in a pot with drainage holes. Wash reused pots and sanitize with a dilute bleach solution (one part bleach and nine parts water) before planting into them. Soak clay pots for 24 hours before using.**

**Place one inch of gravel in bottom of pot and add some soil. Arrange bulbs so they are almost touching. Cover bulbs and firm soil around them. Most bulbs are covered by ½ inch of soil except for hyacinths that may protrude slightly above the soil line. Water to settle the soil. Keep soil moist but not wet or soggy since bulbs will rot if kept too wet.**

**Store potted bulbs in a dark place at 40o to 50o F for six to eight weeks - a little longer for tulips (10 weeks). The best location is probably an old refrigerator that does not cool well. Bulbs can be chilled in any refrigerator, but must not freeze.**

**After chilling, remove pots and place in a cool (50o - 60oF) dark spot for two weeks. Shoots should appear and get one to two inches long. Then move pots into a well-lit room. Water regularly and keep pots from drafts and heaters. They should bloom within four to six weeks. Flowers will last longer if kept cool, 50o to 60o. Throw bulbs away after bloom since forced bulbs seldom bloom well again.**

**Trees and shrubs can be brought inside also. Once buds begin to swell, you can cut them and put them in water to bloom indoors. This works well with quince, forsythia and pussy willow but you can also try azalea, cherry, dogwood and pear.**

**Cutting the flowers just before bloom works best, but they can be cut earlier. Mash the cut end with a hammer. Immediately place in a vase. Replace water daily for best results. Flowers should bloom in a week or so. Here are some suggestions of what to force bloom and when to cut them.**

**Shrubs Cutting Time Forcing Time**

**\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_**

**Azalea late January 3-6 weeks**

**early February**

**Crabapple mid-March 2-3 weeks**

**Flowering Cherry late January 3-4 weeks**

**mid-March 2-3 weeks**

**Flowering Dogwood mid-March 2-4 weeks**

**Flowering Pear late January 4-5 weeks**

**early February 2-3 weeks**

**to mid-March**

**Willow February 1-2 weeks**

**You can also enjoy hardy violets inside - the kind we grow in our yards. Their leaves may be yellow but there is life below ground. Dig the entire clump. Plant it in a pot and place in a sunny window to grow. Water lightly with liquid fertilizer after growth starts. The flowers should come in time.**

**How can we take advantage of these early bloomers? Try bringing the beauty indoors. You can enjoy them inside without fear of frosts. You can also lengthen the season with these tips. For more information call us at 542-2020 or 987-2028.**