

Green Avalon  
1/26/12

## Early Spring Bloomers

Right now many of us gardeners are champing at the bit to get back out in the garden. If there is a warm moment, and the ground is clear of snow, we may find ourselves pacing back and forth in front of areas we know contain crocus, daffodil, and tulip bulbs, looking for signs of growth. There are other plants that bloom in very early spring, that you may want to consider including in your landscape.

Everyone knows about Pussy Willows (*Salix discolor*), the wonderful fuzzy harbingers of spring. Every time I see them blooming I have to laugh, though. When I was in first grade one of my classmates wanted to impress a pretty little girl, so he took Pussy Willows and stuffed them up his nose (who knows what he was thinking, because I don't know a single little girl that would be impressed by that). Well, the Pussy Willows swelled up in that moist environment and he couldn't get them out. They actually had to call an ambulance and take him to the hospital to remove them. Now I know it wasn't laughable to him or his parents, but all us little girls thought it was uproariously funny.

Silly stories aside, there is also Forsythia (*Forsythia*) with its lovely yellow flowers. This is a shrub that is best planted where it has room to grow, as it will spread and become quite large. It can be pruned, but I think it looks much more beautiful if its graceful arching branches are left natural.

One of my favorite borders is Creeping Phlox (*Phlox subulata*) and Candytuft (*Iberis*) alternated. It was something that was planted everywhere in Knoxville, TN, and it made a glorious show when bordering the fronts of the houses or down their walkways. I decided then and there I would repeat this in my own home. As soon as we get the front porch on and know where the walk is going to go, I'll plant that amazing eye-catching border.

Of course in our area of the mid-Atlantic there are azaleas and rhododendrons galore.

Many of the spring bloomers are also shade lovers, so keep that in mind. Plants such as Monkshood (*Aconitum*), Columbine (*Aquilegia canadensis*), Dutchman's Breeches (*Dicentra cucullaria*), and Foamflower (*Tiarella cordifolia*) all bloom in the early spring, but need shade when the days get longer and hotter.

For shrubs you might want to consider Spirea, Daphne (*Daphne odora*), and Flowering Quince (*Chaenomeles speciosa*).

Redbud (*Cercis canadensis*), Dogwood (*Cornus florida*), and Japanese Magnolia (*Magnolia X soulangeana* (*M. denudata* X *M. lilliflora*)) are all early spring blooming smaller trees. Both the Redbud and the Dogwood are considered understory trees, so they prefer to be planted where they're not in full sun all day.

Now is the time to plan where you want some splashes of color during the spring. That way you can look for them at your local nursery early in the season and get them planted this year.