

Forsythia

Border forsythia (*Forsythia x intermedia*), or golden bell, ushers in spring with its vivid golden yellow flowers and is one of the most recognized shrubs in the South. It is adapted to all areas of South Carolina.

MATURE HEIGHT/SPREAD

It grows 8 to 10 feet tall and 10 to 12 feet wide. It has an erect habit, with most canes growing upright. Some are weeping, creating a wild, unkempt look. The form varies depending on the variety.

GROWTH RATE

It grows at a rapid rate and is long-lived.

ORNAMENTAL FEATURES

The early spring flower is the most appealing feature of this plant. Flowers are usually profuse, and open before the leaves emerge on the plant. With an unusually mild winter, bloom may occur as early as late January, but usually occurs in March. Flowers will last for two or three weeks unless killed by cold. The yellow flower color varies with varieties, ranging from pale to deep yellow. The flowers are 1¼ to 1½ inches long and wide, bell-like and produced in clusters. They bloom on last year's wood. Dark green leaves emerge shortly after bloom. In the fall they may turn slightly yellow or burgundy, but usually die off green.

LANDSCAPE USE

Forsythias do not belong in areas where they must be kept in bounds, such as in foundation plantings. They are best used as a specimen or in shrub borders and groupings. They can become unruly and require some maintenance wherever they are grown.

The ideal soil is fertile, loose and well-drained, although it will tolerate almost any soil condition. Plant in full sun for maximum flower. Forsythia competes successfully with the demanding roots of other shrubs and trees and transplants easily.

Prune in spring after flowering so that buds for the next year can develop in the fall. Potential flowers for the next year will be cut off if the plant is pruned after the

buds develop. Pruning should not be a shearing process, but a thinning out of the older branches at the base of the plant, allowing the more vigorous branches to take over. They are often sheared to make a formal hedge or to reduce the size of the plant, but this detracts from the graceful habit of growth. They can be cut back to the ground and allowed to produce all new growth.

Forsythia can be forced to bloom indoors before it would normally occur outdoors. Any time from January to spring, cut branches, bring indoors and place them in water. Flowers will open in about 10 days.

PROBLEMS

There are no serious problems with forsythia in South Carolina.

CULTIVARS AND VARIETIES

- 'Beatrix Farrand' – This 8- to 10-foot-tall shrub has vivid golden yellow flowers.
- 'Karl Sax' – This is shorter and has a bushier habit than 'Beatrix Farrand.' It has golden yellow flowers.
- 'Lynwood' – This has an upright growth habit and lighter yellow flowers than the species.
- 'Spectabilis' – This shrub, known as Showy Border Forsythia, is vigorous and grows 10 feet tall and wide. The flower is bright yellow.

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