

Pussy Willow

Salix discolor

We always took some cuttings of Pussy Willow while winter was still raging and snow blanketing the ground. Set in water and placed in a sunny window, the branches burst like popping corn with showy blossoms promising spring to come. Pussy Willow is a poorly formed, multistemmed tree or shrub growing in moist or wet locations. Trunks rarely get larger than six inches and most all are rife with gangly and broken branches. Only new growth is attractive. Prone to rot and decay, older trunks are pocked and scarred. Pussy Willows do provide early season food for songbirds, waterfowl, and small mammals. It also attracts butterflies.



Identification

Leaves

Deciduous, alternate, simple, elliptical or oblong, weakly serrated, 2-4" long, blue-green above and pale, almost white below.



Bark/Wood

Gray brown, initially smooth, becoming split and shallowly furrowed or scaly with age. Very weak wood.



Flower/Fruit

Dioecious; very fuzzy, silvery gray, 1 inch long, appearing in late winter or early spring prior to leaf emergence.



Form

Small, multistemmed tree or shrub. Larger trunks often rotted or scarred. Branches often broken.



Uses

The flowering shoots are used as harbingers of spring and forced indoors during the winter. Many religious groups use pussy willows rather than palm fronds. Provides food and habitat for wildlife. Used in conservation plantings.

Ethnobotany

Native Distribution

US north of Tennessee and as far north as Hudson Bay and the Northwest Territories.

Establishment

Easily rooted from hardwood cuttings without treatment.

Growing Conditions and Culture

Mature Size 25'Hx20'Wx1'dbh
 USDA Zone 2-9
 Light Requirements Shade to Part Sun

Soils
 Drought Tolerant?
 Inundation Tolerant?

Moist/Neutral pH

No

Yes

Pests/Damaging Agents

Seemingly immune from pests.

Similar Species

Propagation

Seeds - sow fresh in late spring. Hardwood cuttings in winter root easily.

Source(s)

Oregon Orion Farms.