

Create a Spring Bouquet

Enjoy a daily reminder that spring is on its way!
Introduce plant science through this exploration activity.
Learn to become a curious and patient observer of nature.

Materials Needed:

Jar or vase, heavy-duty scissors or pruning shears (for grown-up to use).
Optional: ribbon, decorations.

Instructions:

Step 1: Bundle up and go outside together. Walk or drive to a spot where you can find fresh thin twigs. Short brush along ditches, or willows or alders with many branches are good options.



Step 2: Select 3-10 twigs that have closed buds on them. Cut twigs 1 to 2 feet long. Take your cut twigs inside. (You can select from the same plant or sample twigs from different plants).



Step 3: Talk with your child(ren) about water. It is the magic ingredient plants are waiting for! The sun needs to melt all that snow outside. Suggest that you could make spring come early inside your home!

UAMN Virtual Early Explorers: Water



Step 4: Fill a vase, glass jar, or recycled juice container with water. Place your bouquet of twigs into the vase. Decorate the jar with a ribbon, or decorate the branches!

Step 5: Wait a few days. Observe the way the buds on the branches look each day. Ask your child if they can see any green yet. Where do they think the leaves are hiding? Build up curiosity (and patience!).

Step 6: After 6 to 10 days, you should be able to spot buds starting to “leaf out” (or in some species, produce catkins). The bouquet will eventually turn a nice leafy green color and remind everyone that spring is around the corner.



Try observing buds on the branches of trees outside. When there is enough warmth and water, they will eventually produce leaves or catkins, the same way as the twigs in your jar!



Birch trees. Image: Needpix.com.



Willows. Image: Needpix.com.

Interior Alaska Trees and Shrubs

Once the leaves (and in some cases catkins) emerge out of your spring bouquet, you will have another clue to identify which tree or shrub your twigs came from. Do you see any familiar leaf shapes or features in these pictures?

Alaska Paper Birch
(*Betula neoalaskana*)



Needpix.com

Balsam Poplar
(*Populus balsamifera*)



Virginia Tech

Red Alder
(*Alnus rubra*)



Luke McGuff, Flickr

There are many species of willows in Interior Alaska. Willows share similar characteristics.

Alaska Willow (*Salix alaxensis*)



Wikimedia Commons

Bebb Willow
(*Salix Bebbiana*)



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