



Pussy Willow

► WHAT the first robin is in the animal world, pussy willows are in the world of plants—the universally recognized early heralds of spring. There are other animals and plants that sound the very first notes—though not much earlier than these, at that—but robin and pussy willow recollections date back to childhood, and are known by everyone. They will, therefore, hold their primacy so long as our race has any traditions.

There are many kinds of pussies borne by as many kinds of willow; for the name of the willow tribe is legion, ranging from the humble, foot-high prairie willow with its tiny, glistening catkins, to the great gnarled and spreading trees of the black willow, or the weeping willow, imported from Europe, which we see in cemeteries and on lawns. The largest and finest pussy willows, which now have a considerable sale at florists' shops, are those of the goat willow, a native of Europe and Asia.

These harmless, charming, furry wild kittens so beloved of children everywhere, are in reality the flower clusters of the willow. Unlike most trees, willows and their relatives are bisexual, that is, male and female flowers are borne on separate individuals. The necessity for transferring pollen for some distance, plus the fact that

wind has to be depended on in the absence of any reliable insects at this time of year, accounts for the enormous numbers of flower clusters on every tree—for each catkin consists of from 20 to 100 separate, primitive flowers.

It is the business of the females to catch the pollen that is shed into the air in invisible clouds by the yellow male catkins on other trees. After fertilization is thus brought about, the seeds of the willows are launched on little cottony parachutes, much like those of the cottonwood, but less woolly and hence less troublesome.

If you have a vase of pussy willows, either from the florist's or obtained in the old-fashioned natural way, you can easily establish a willow bush of your own, and thus be sure of an abundant supply of catkins every year. Just let them stand in water until they throw out roots, and then plant them in your back yard, or, if the ground is still frozen, in a pot of sand until the soil outdoors thaws out. Willows are the toughest of plants, and will grow even in the shadow of a railroad yard or a blast furnace.

Do this and in a couple of years you will have a thrifty willow bush that will bear a crop of gray velvet fairy kittens every spring.

Science News Letter, March 3, 1951

GENERAL SCIENCE

**College Laboratories Available for Defense**

► MORE than a thousand college and university laboratories will be available for defense research and development projects. Plans to discover the kinds of jobs they can do have been announced by Dean Athelstan F. Spilhaus of the University of Minnesota, chairman of a sub-committee of the Engineering College Research Council.

The survey, which will study the status of research facilities and personnel in the colleges, has the cooperation of the Defense Department's Research and Development Board.

College and university research facilities will become more available for defense work as student enrollment is depleted by the draft. The schools are expected to seek defense contracts in an effort to hold their teaching staffs together during the emergency.

Along this line, Dean Spilhaus emphasized that contracts should not be limited to a small number of schools. He declared that the Research and Development Board is certain that the nation's research needs will compel the intelligent use of every available facility and skill. This project is designed to provide the information by which defense research contracts may be channeled to institutions, both large and small, on an equitable and rational basis.

The information will be available soon after April 1. The project covers a broad list of engineering and scientific fields.

Science News Letter, March 3, 1951

Makers of good *apple juice* often use two or more varieties of apples in order to obtain a proper sugar-acid ratio.

Congress in 1843 appropriated money to build the first *telegraph* line in the world; it extended from Washington to Baltimore, and was later extended to New York by private funds.

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