March Hort Report

Today I have brought in Salix gracilistyla ‘Melanostachys’, the black pussy willow. It’s an attractive deciduous shrub in winter, with purplish black bark. The previous year’s growth, on which it will flower, is reddish in color. In early March, the black catkins start to swell, and develop red anthers, which turn yellow when pollen forms on the tips. The flowers continue to look good into April. It makes a wonderful cut flower when almost nothing else is in bloom, and will root easily for sharing with friends. This is a multi-stemmed plant which reaches 6 to 10 feet high and wide. It should be pruned right after it’s finished flowering. I like to cut mine back hard every three to four years to keep the size down, and to keep the flowers at a height where they can be easily seen. This shrub likes a wet location in full sun, but will tolerate light shade. Like all willows, it likes being near a stream, and is also good for a rain garden. Mine is planted by an underground spring. The finely toothed 4 inch leaves, which unfurl after bloom, are dark green above, and silver-green below. I love this shrub! Last February I brought in Salix matsudana (curly willow) to share; I will happily share cuttings of ‘Melanostachys’ if you ask.