

Black Pussy Willow

Salix gracilistyla var. *melanostachys*



Sometimes young black pussy willows wear little “hats” that are pushed off as the flowers develop. These are the bud casings.

One of the most unique willows to observe in late winter or early spring is the black pussy willow. It is a widely spreading shrub with long, graceful, scarlet branches.

The furry catkins (flower clusters) that cover the branches in early spring give the pussy willow its common name.

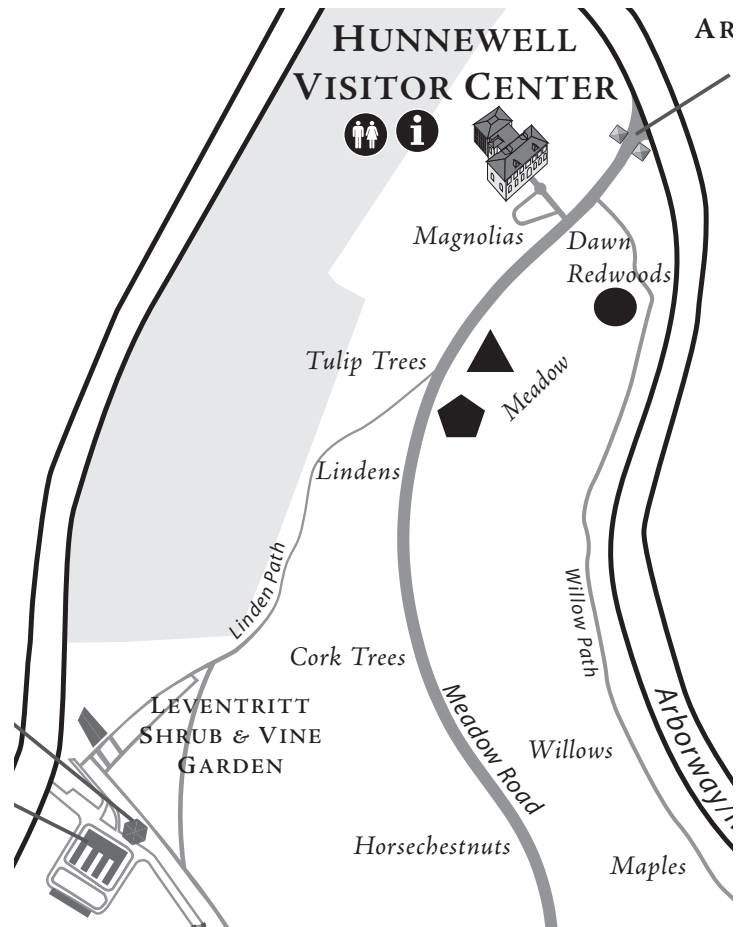
Willows are dioecious, meaning the male and female flowers appear as catkins on separate plants. The 1" to 2" catkins are produced on bare stems, making them stand out visually. When flowers are produced before the leaves, as is common with pussy willows, we call them precocious.

Willows that you can find at the Arboretum

Although the common name black pussy willow (*Salix gracilistyla* var. *melanostachys* ▲) implies that the catkins are black, they are actually very dark, red-purple with anthers of deep red. **Melano** is the Greek word for “very dark” and *stachys* means “spike” or “catkin.” It is a variety of the rosegold pussy willow (*Salix gracilistyla* ◆) named as such because the anthers on the male catkins turn from bright red to yellow.

Another pussy willow you will find near the meadow is *Salix daphnoides* (violet willow ●). It has catkins that are large, bright, and silvery, or appear in varying hues of pink and red.

The pussy willows described above are native to Japan, Korea, Manchuria, and China. There is also a native pussy willow (*Salix discolor*), which grows in wet areas over much of the eastern United States but is not currently growing at the Arboretum.



The willow collection at the Arboretum is located just down from the Visitor Center, next to the meadow.

More about pussy willows!

Rosegold pussy willows and black pussy willows, like the typical willow, are **entomophilous**, which means they are pollinated by insects. Some willows; however, are **anemophilous**, pollinated by the wind.

Remember, no picking in the Arboretum, but “petting” the soft catkins is most certainly encouraged!