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 in late winter or early spring is the black pussy willow. It is a widely spreading shrub with long, graceful, scarlet branches.

Do you know where pussy willow gets its common name?  

*See back for the answer...*
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 flowers are on one plant and female flowers are on another. The 1” to 2” furry catkins are produced on bare stems, making them stand out visually. When flowers are produced before the leaves, as is common with the pussy willows, we call them **precocious**.

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.” Rosegold pussy willow (**Salix gracilistyla**) has bright red anthers on the male catkins that turn orange, then yellow, giving this plant the name rosegold.

Both pussy willows 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. Like most other willows, the pussy willow grows in moist or wet places. 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.

Another pussy willow will you will find on Meadow Road is **Salix daphnoides** (violet willow). It has catkins that are large, bright, and silvery, or appear in varying hues of pink and red. Violet pussy willow is another plant of Asian origin.

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