

A colorful display of forced bulbs on a bleak winter's day is a wonderful addition to any home and is surprisingly easy to accomplish.

'Forcing' is the term used to describe the process that stimulates bulbs to bloom out of season. Among the most commonly forced bulb flowers are Paperwhites and Amaryllis. Additionally, forced Hyacinths, Daffodils, Crocus, Snowdrops and Tulips take a few extra steps but are fun too. Bare bulbs can be stored for several weeks in your refrigerator or a very cool, well-ventilated place prior to forcing. By staggering the 'Forcing Process', you can enjoy the flowers for a longer time.

## Forcing Paperwhites

Paperwhites started in November and December take only three to four weeks to come into bloom.

Step 1 - Fill two thirds of a bowl with pebbles. Firm the base of the bulbs into the pebbles until they stand firmly on their own.

Step 2- Add water so that the water just touches the base of the bulbs. Do not submerge bulbs in the water. If desired, add more pebbles to stabilize the bulbs.

Step 3- Put the bowl in a cool dark spot (55°-60° F) for two to three weeks.

An unheated room works well. As soon as growth appears, place in the light at room temperature. Keep adding water, especially once the bulbs are rooted.

The warmth and light will trigger the growth of leaves and flowers. Bright Light and temperature are the most important factors in promoting successful flowering. Often paper white stems will grow too long.

**Tip for Success** - Alcohol can be used to stunt the foliage growth. Once the green shoots reach about one to two inches, pour off the existing water. Replace the water with a solution of 10% alcohol and continue to use the alcohol solution for future watering. To achieve that proportion, you can use isopropyl alcohol (rubbing alcohol) with water mixed at 1 part alcohol to 10 parts water. With all forced bulbs, the flower stalks may become too tall to fit the container or situation. You can extend enjoyment of color and fragrance by cutting the flower stalk and transferring it to a water filled vase.

## Forcing Hyacinths

Hyacinths need a 'Chill Time' to allow them to bloom the best indoors.

**Tip for Success** - Force a few bulbs at a time to stagger the Hyacinth bloom times.

Step 1- Place bulbs in a paper bag and close up the top of the bag. Keep in your refrigerator for 8-10 weeks.

Step 2 - Remove bulbs from bag. Fill two thirds of a bowl with pebbles. Firm the base of the bulbs into the pebbles until they stand firmly on their own.

Step 3- Add water so that the water just touches the base of the bulbs. Do not submerge bulbs in the water. If desired, add more pebbles to stabilize bulbs.

Step 4- Put the bowl in a cool dark spot (55°-60° F) for two to three weeks. An unheated room works well. As soon as growth appears, place in the light at room temperature. Keep adding water, especially once the bulbs are rooted. The warmth and light will trigger the growth of leaves and flowers. Bright Light and temperature are the most important factors in promoting successful flowering.

## Forcing Amaryllis Bulbs

Unlike most other bulbs, Amaryllis bulbs will bloom again and again, provided they are properly cared for each year.

Step 1A – Plant Amaryllis Bulb in potting soil. Fill a clean container with drainage holes about two-thirds full of potting soil. Place the bulb in position, and cover with additional soil. If the top of the bulb is exposed, that is fine. Water well in order to settle the soil around the bulb.

OR

Step 1B - Plant Amaryllis Bulb in bowl filled with 2-3 inches of pebbles. Firm the base of the bulb into the pebbles until it stands firmly on its own. Add water so that the water just touches the base of the bulb. Do not submerge bulb in the water and add more pebbles to stabilize the bulb.

Step 2 - Put the Bowl or Container in a cool dark spot (55°-60° F) for two to three weeks. An unheated room works well. As soon as growth appears, place in bright light at room temperature. Keep adding water, especially once the bulb is rooted. The warmth and light will trigger the growth of leaves and flowers.

Step 3 - After the bulb finishes blooming, cut off the flower stalk close to the base. If grown in pebbles, plant bulb in potting soil to help keep for the next holiday season. Keep the plant moist; water and fertilize as you would any houseplant. They can even be summered outdoors (protect from afternoon sun).

Step 4 - Stop watering and feeding about Labor Day, allowing the plant to completely dry out. Remove dead foliage as it appears. They can even be put into a box in a dark closet for this period of time.

Step 5 - In early November, water sparingly until the first sprout appears, and then keep moist. In about eight weeks the bulb will bloom again.

**Tip for Success** - Bright Light and temperature are the most important factors in promoting successful flowering.

## Forcing Other Bulbs

### Planting in soil – Crocus, Daffodils, Tulips & Snowdrops

Hardy Crocus, Daffodils, Tulips, and Snowdrops grow best in potting soil.

Step 1- Fill a clean container with drainage holes about two-thirds full of potting soil. Place the bulbs in position, and cover with additional soil. If the top of the bulb is exposed, that is fine. Water well in order to settle the soil around the bulbs. Bulbs can be planted very close together, even touching, to make the best show.

Step 2 - To initiate root and shoot growth, put the pots in the refrigerator or an outdoor protected spot. Ideally, the temperature should be 35° to 48° F. The soil should be kept moist through the rooting and cooling period. Most bulbs will not flower without this extended chilling time. A good rule of thumb: Bulbs ready to bring indoors when you see the foliage shoots 2-3 inches above the soil and fine white roots emerging from the drainage holes, and at least 90 days have passed.

Step 3 - It's time to bring the pots out of cold storage. Place indoors with indirect sunlight and temperatures about 60° F for a week or two. When shoots are four to six inches tall, move the pots to a bright, sunny window to stimulate blooming. Fertilize with a half-strength solution of houseplant fertilizer. A temperature of about 68° F and direct sunlight will produce the best results.

Step 4 - When the buds take on color, return the plants to indirect sunlight to make the blossoms last. Keep the soil moist at all times. The flowers will open faster in a warmer room, but will not last long. To prolong the bloom time, keep the plants in a cool place.

**Note** - Bulbs will flower some three to four weeks after they have been brought into warmer temperatures. Thus, from time of planting to flowering, allow a period of 15 weeks, comprised of 12 weeks for rooting plus 3 weeks in warmer temperatures. You can manipulate the flowering time by delaying the planting time or by leaving them in the refrigerator /outdoor location longer. After the bulbs have finished flowering, they can be planted directly into the garden.

**Do not use these same bulbs for forcing again next season, because so much of the bulbs' energy has been used in the forcing process.**