
FORCING SPRING BLOOMING BULBS

Which bulbs work well-

Paperwhites, Amaryllis, Colchicum, Dwarf Daffodils, Hyacinths, Tulips, Crocus, Iris reticulata, Freesia, Muscari (Grape Hyacinth)

How to do it-

Stimulating a plant to bloom out of season is called forcing. The concept is simple – bulbs that are going to be forced into bloom require a period of chilling to mimic winter and a period of warmth to trick them into thinking it is spring and time to bloom. Some bulbs, like paperwhites, amaryllis and colchicum do not require chilling. The bulbs can be chilled before or after they are planted. Keep them in a cool dark place, about 30-50 degrees f. The amount of time they need to be chilled is dependent on the bulb size – chill smaller bulbs for 6-10 weeks and larger bulbs for 10-14 weeks. The easiest method of chilling is placing the bulbs in a paper bag and storing them in your fridge, but not in the crisper with ripe fruit or vegetables. If you are planting before you chill the bulbs, make sure you keep the soil medium moist as they will be growing roots during this period. After the chilling period, plant bulbs if still required and move them to a bright cool location out of direct light, about 60 degrees f. After a couple of inches of top growth move them to a brighter place, receiving plenty of light and wait for the blooms. Forced flowers last much longer in a cool location.

How to plant the bulbs-

Depending on the type of bulb, you can plant in water alone, pebbles and water, or potting soil.

When planting in water alone, the bottom of the bulb should be just at water level in the lower section of the glass. Add water as needed to maintain this level during growth. The method works well for hyacinths and crocus. There are special hyacinth glasses designed with an upper compartment for the bulb and a lower compartment into which the roots grow. This method lets you watch the roots grow. Adding a small piece of activated charcoal will help prevent the growth of algae. Place the planted glasses in a cool, dark place (around 55 degrees f) until the roots are well developed and top growth has begun, maintaining the water level. Then transfer glasses to a room with plenty of light and temperatures around 65 degrees. You can expect blossoms in 3-4 weeks.

Planting in pebbles and water is a wonderful method for forcing paperwhites. These bulbs do not require chilling and will bloom about a month after planting. Fill an undrained, decorative container with enough pebbles, decorative rocks or similar material to reach about an inch below the top. Add water until it is barely below the surface of the rocks. Set the bulbs on top and you can hold the bulbs in place by adding enough rocks to cover the bottom quarter of the bulbs. Carefully maintain the water level. Keep these bulbs in a cool, dark room for several weeks to provide for root growth and then move them to a bright location. Each of the bulbs will send up shoots with many tiny flowers. Successive plantings made two weeks apart, from mid-October on, can give you fragrant indoor blooms from Thanksgiving until March.

When planting in soil, don't worry about fertilizing as the bulbs contain enough food for the development of flowers. The best bulbs for this method are those with short-stemmed blossoms; if you want to use taller types, make sure they are small flowered. Select a pot that is big enough so that you can plant several flower bulbs in it. Generally, 6 tulips, 3 hyacinths, 6 daffodils or 15 crocus will fit in a 6- or 7-inch pot. Any kind of clean container can be used. If it has been used before, clean it thoroughly. Bulbs can be planted in earthenware, plastic or glass pots. It is important that the

container is at least 4 inches deep and has drainage. Soak clay pots overnight so they will not draw excess moisture from the growing medium. If you are using a pot without drainage holes, cover the bottom with pot shard or clay marbles for better drainage. Partially fill the pot with growing medium and press down lightly; potting soil or bulb planting mix work best. Then press the bulbs slightly into the growing medium; they may almost touch each other. Place tulip bulbs with their flat side toward the wall of the pot. Add more growing medium to the pot until the tips of the bulbs disappear beneath the growing medium. Water the growing medium thoroughly to encourage root development. Now place the planted bulbs in a cool place for the specified period of time. Place in dark or low light for best results. After the cold treatment, put the bulbs in a warm well-lit room. It will be another 2 to 3 weeks before the flowers will appear in full bloom. Once the flowers begin to show color, take them out of direct sunlight. Rotate the pot every few days so that they do not lean toward the strongest light source.

How long after the chilling period until the bulbs bloom-

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| Paperwhites | 3-5 weeks |
| Hyacinths | 2-3 weeks |
| Amaryllis | 6-8 weeks |
| Muscari | 2-3 weeks |
| Crocus | 2-3 weeks |
| Tulips | 2-3 weeks |
| Daffodils | 4-5 weeks |