

Forcing Bulbs

CHOOSING BULBS TO FORCE

- The types usually chosen to force are early-blooming, large bulbs.
- Hyacinths are the most reliable, narcissi is very popular and crocus is the favourite smaller bulb. But don't limit yourself to these only as there are many others to choose from.
- Make sure you choose bulbs which are recommended for indoor cultivation, and select bulbs that are good-sized and firm.

CHOOSING THE CONTAINER

- Choose shallow plastic or clay containers. Bonsai pots are a great choice. Be sure the container is twice the depth of your chosen bulb to provide room for root development.
- It is advisable to choose a pot with drainage holes if forcing is to take place in the open garden.

PLANTING

- Use GARDENWORKS indoor potting soil to stabilize the bulbs while they are growing.
- Start with a layer of moist soil in the bottom of the container. Place bulbs on this base with tips facing upwards. Make sure that the tips are also below the rim of the container.
- For the best display, set the bulbs close together but not touching each other or the sides of the container.
- Fill soil in around the bulbs, pressing firmly but not too tightly. The necks of hyacinths, narcissus and daffodils should protrude above the soil level. All others can be covered. The container should then be watered so that the growing medium is damp.

COLD PERIOD

- The bulbs now need a cold, but frost-free period in the dark. Place containers in a shady part of the garden. Cover with 15cm (6") of peat, light soil, leaves or sawdust. If you live in a very cold region, or if you have no outdoor area, keep containers in a crawl space, garage or a dark, cool place. The ideal temperature for chilling bulbs is between just above freezing and 5°C (41°F). Be certain that the temperature does not exceed 9°C (48°F) during the cold period, as this would prompt growth too soon.
- If you don't have an outdoor area or cold crawl-space, put the bulbs in the refrigerator. Be certain to protect them against the ethylene gas produced by apples and other fruit by placing the pots or containers in a plastic bag and sealing with tape or a twist tie.

BRINGING THE BULBS INDOORS

- The cold period can last anywhere from 13-20 weeks depending on the species and exact temperature. Crocus, Daffodils and Muscari need approx. 15 weeks, whereas some Tulips may require 20. When there is about one inch of green growth on top of each bulb it is time to bring the container into a cool room indoors.
- Place the container in a shady spot for the first 4-5 days, then move it near a window. The leaves will now develop and in a couple of weeks buds will form.
- When the buds begin to colour, the container should be moved to the desired flowering spot. Bright but not sunny, free from draughts, away from a heater or radiator and not too warm.
- Keep the compost moist at all times and occasionally turn the container to promote even growth.

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BULBS IN WATER (THE BULB VASE)

The most popular container for forcing bulbs in water is the “bulb vase”. These glass receptacles are specially designed for holding large bulbs such as hyacinths.

- Fill the lower section of the vase with water then place the bulb in the upper section with its base just touching the water.
- The water level in the vase must be maintained at 0.3cm (1/8”) below the base of the bulb.

PAPERWHITES

Some smaller bulbs, such as paperwhites and miniature narcissus are often grown in bowls of gravel.

- Use a fine quality landscape gravel or marbles. Do not choose gravel with sharp edges, as these may damage the bulbs and their emerging roots.
- Gently wedge the bulbs in the gravel with only the tips protruding. The water level must be maintained to just below the base of the bulb.
- Get your newly-planted vases and bowls ready for chilling by wrapping them up well. Place the containers in a good wooden box, and loosely fill the box with crumpled newspaper to protect against severe cold, as well as breakage. In very cold climates, the box can be covered with burlap sacking, rugs or more newspaper. See steps 4 and 5 on the other side of this sheet for complete chilling instructions.

PRE-CHILLED BULBS

- Pre-chilled bulbs are great for beginners, and do not require as much time from initial purchase to blooming time.
- By providing water and warm conditions to pre-chilled bulbs, you can force them to the flowering stage in only 3 to 4 weeks, so they allow one to plant as late as November for Christmas blooms.
- Popular pre-chilled bulbs include the narcissi, paperwhites and the Chinese sacred lily.
- Hyacinths are also very popular, but many people do not realize that they need to be chilled further and require different treatment. See the bottom paragraph for more information on chilled (prepared) Hyacinths.

TIMING FOR PRE-CHILLED BULBS

Pre-Chilled bulbs only need about a month from planting time to bloom time. Use the following chart to determine when to plant your bulbs. This chart does not include treatment for Hyacinths.

PLANTING DATE	BLOOMING DATE
November 15	December 25
December 1	New Years Day
January 15	Valentines Day

PREPARED HYACINTHS

Hyacinths require 13 to 15 weeks of cold to come out of dormancy, but you can take 5 weeks off this time by buying prepared hyacinths. Prepared hyacinths will need another 8 to 10 weeks of chilling before they will sprout.

DID YOU KNOW?
Handling hyacinths can cause painful itching to many people, so be sure to wear gloves when coming into contact with these bulbs.

