



Forcing Bulbs for Indoor Color

Forcing bulbs are a way of bringing a plant to flower out of season or in a different way than it would normally. This is a great way of bringing your garden indoors just when a lot of us are most desperate for color and flowers.

Best Bulbs

Hyacinth, tulips, daffodils, Dutch iris, and crocus can all be forced indoors.

Soil and Pots

Always use a good, clean potting soil. Pots with drainage are very important. Clay works well with most bulbs because they are porous and will not cause the bulb to rot – some bulbs would prefer to dry out. Plastic pots are great for woodland bulbs that would like the soils to stay moist longer. You will need to find pots that will allow the bulb to sit at the depth that they would in the ground, allowing for another inch of soil below the bulb.

Depth

Do not press the bulb into the soil. Compressing the bulb into the soil may impede root growth. Leave one finger width between each bulb. When planting your bulb, place the flat side of the bulb facing out. This way the first leaf will then grow over the edge of the pot. The tip of the bulb is the top, and the flat end is the bottom. The tips of tulips and daffodils can have the tips showing at the top of the pot. You can top dress the top of the pot to help with moisture retention and appearance. Label each pot with name and date.

Watering

Do not allow soil mix to dry out completely. Check soil moisture regularly. As plants begin to root and grow, you will need to water more often.

Cold Storage

There are two methods. One way to give your bulbs their cold period is to bury them outside in a hole or trench of straw that will be the same depth as the pot. You can also place your pot in a root cellar or refrigerator. Take out the light bulb. Your bulb will require total darkness just like they were in the ground. Note: Do not store your apples with your bulbs, the ethylene gas apples produce will cause your flowers to abort.

Temperature

The temperature should remain between 35 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit (2-10 Celsius).

How Long?

Check your bulbs regularly for watering needs. Earlier flowering varieties will require less storage time, so about 10 weeks. Later blooming varieties may require up to 16 weeks. When your bulbs are ready, new shoots will be visible and roots will show at the bottom of the pot. (New shoots will be pale



yellow or white.) Move container to a cool room or greenhouse with a temperature around 50-55 degrees Fahrenheit or 10-12 Celsius. Initially, keep your bulbs out of direct sunlight. Once the shoots turn green and elongate, move them into more direct light. Keep your pots moist but not soggy wet.

Aftercare

In the home, your flowers will last longer if the pot is moved into a cooler room at night. You can fertilize with a basic fertilizer at this time, as the bulb will store this energy for next year. After your flowers are finished, you can plant your bulbs outside in the spring, or you can allow the bulb to go dormant and plant in the fall.

Prepared Bulbs

You can purchase prepared bulbs. This will simply shorten the length of time you are forcing them. It is not a great advantage – takes off 10 days to 2 weeks. You would follow the same procedures as above.

Hyacinth Bulb in a Glass Vase

Place bulb in the glass vase, store in a cool space (like the refrigerator, root cellar) without sunlight. Keep the water level just below the base of the bulb. Roots will grow rapidly. Wait until the flower buds begin to show color before moving the rooted hyacinth into a warm, brightly lit room. The flowering shoots when develop and produce a bloom. After forcing a hyacinth in this manner, discard the bulb. This kind of forcing will exhaust the bulb and it is unlikely to produce a healthy display the following year.

Tender Daffodils

Paperwhites can be grown indoors without the chilling period. They usually take about six weeks from start to finish. Ziva is the traditional fragrant variety, and Inbal is the variety with little or no scent. Paperwhites require full sunlight as soon as the shoots appear – otherwise they become leggy and will require staking for support. Another technique developed at Cornell University is to use a 4% solution of Gin, Vodka, or rubbing alcohol (one part alcohol and 9 parts water) to stunt the leggy growth of the paperwhites.

Amaryllis

Amaryllis can also be grown for indoor planting. This bulb does not require chilling and will bloom in about 10 weeks. Plant with about 1/3 of the bulb above the soil grade of the pot. Plant in a pot with drainage and good, fresh potting soil. Water at first planting and be aware of soil moisture. Over-watering will rot the bulb. Keep a bit more soil moisture in the pot once you see the leaves and flower bud begin to form. Grow the bulb in full sun, and turn the pot daily to keep the bulb from leaning.