

BULB FORCING

Nothing cheers up a dreary winter better than bright colorful flowers. Forcing bulbs is a wonderful way to bring spring color and fragrance into your home.

The most common forcing bulbs are daffodils, tulips, crocuses and hyacinths, but try experimenting with other hardy bulbs.

Choose large-sized, disease-free, firm bulbs and make sure you use clean pots with good drain holes. Fill each pot ½ full with light and well draining soil. Gently place bulbs into soil with their tops even with the rim and fill the pots to cover the bulbs. The first watering will settle the soil.

The pots of bulbs now need to be cool and dark in order to develop roots. Bulbs require 14-16 weeks of cooling at temperatures between 35 and 45 degrees. There are two ways to cool your bulbs:

1. Many people find a crawl space, root cellar or an unheated basement, the most convenient. Others use their refrigerator. As long as there is no fruit in the crisper, this is an ideal spot for their cool, dark stay.
2. The other method is called “trenching”. Dig a trench outdoors 6 inches wider than the pots and deep enough for the pots to be below frost line. Spread an inch of gravel at the bottom for drainage. Set the pots on the gravel in the trench. Fill with straw, put a board over the top and cover with straw. This enables you to water if the pots get too dry.

Bring the pots out of the trench or out of their “winter” home 3 to 4 weeks before you want them to bloom. It’s a good idea to bring out one or two pots at a time in order to lengthen the succession of bloom time.

Give the bulb pots a temperature around 30 degrees and direct sunlight. Rotate the pots so all the leaves get equal light. To make the blooms last longer, remove from direct sun when buds begin to show color and place in a cool, but bright spot.

After blooms face, these bulbs should be discarded.

NOTE: Amaryllis, Paperwhite Narcissus and Freesias do not need a cooling period.