

Forcing Paperwhites & Other Spring Bulbs

Fill your home with spring blooming bulbs in winter! Hyacinth, daffodils or paperwhites, tulips and crocus are the easiest way to bring sunshine into your home this winter.

The idea behind forcing bulbs is to trick them into blooming by putting them through a series of climatic changes that mimic the plant's normal cycle.

Planting Medium: No soil is needed. You can grow your bulbs in rocks and water. Choose an attractive dish or vase with no drain hole and fill it most of the way with pebbles. Place the bulbs on top of the pebbles with the pointed end up. Continue filling in the container with more pebbles without completely burying the bulb. Add water until it reaches right below the bulbs, but isn't touching them. Keep the water at this level. The bulbs will root and become more solid in the dish in about a week or two. If soil is used instead, you can plant the bulbs out in the garden after they are done blooming, but it may take a couple of years before they bloom properly. Most bulbs should be buried about 2 to 4 inches in the soil.

Growth & Blooming: Place pots in good light in a room that is at least 55°F to 60°F. From this point until they bloom, plants must stay well watered. If they are in rocks and water, keep the water level directly below the bulbs. A cool, sunny window is great, but once the buds have set you may want to move them to a cool spot with indirect light. This will help the flowers last longer. Keeping the bulbs too warm will result in leggy plants that need to be staked. If your plants always get too leggy, you can try using alcohol to stunt the growth of the stalk by replacing the water once you see the root and stem growth start. Replace the water with a mixture of one part rubbing alcohol, gin, or vodka to nine parts water.

Dormancy Again: If you forced your bulbs in soil, then after flowers die cut off the flower stem but keep the leaves. Place pots outside in a sunny spot and gradually decrease the water until the foliage dies back. When the bulbs are fully dormant store in a dry, well-ventilated place until it is time to plant again. Bulbs forced in water cannot be planted, they used up all their reserved food and won't grow anymore.

