

Forcing Bulbs into Winter Bloom

A pot of flowering bulbs can add colour in a home in the dead of winter. With a little patience and skill, bulbs, such as daffodils, tulips, and hyacinths, can be forced into bloom indoors. The principle behind this is just to mimic the natural conditions under which bulbs bloom. Bulbs for forcing must be purchased new each year, except for the amaryllis bulb. Some bulbs, such as hyacinths, can be purchased specially-prepared by cooling, which will decrease the amount of time it takes to bring them into bloom.

Soil and Potting

- Purchase fresh, dormant bulbs in the fall and prepare a porous, lightweight potting soil which will drain well.
- A mixture of one part potting soil, one part peat, and one part perlite or vermiculite makes a good mix.
- The pots used should be shallow and only slightly larger than the bulb itself.
- A good show can be gotten by planting 3 to 5 bulbs together in a pot about 8-10" in diameter.
- The bulbs should not touch each other or the side of the pot. They should be planted so that the neck of the bulb is just showing above the soil.

Temperature and Timing

- After potting, the bulbs should be watered and kept at a low temperature of 40 to 45°F or 10°C for 8 to 12 weeks, depending on the variety you are growing.
- Regularly check the pots to keep them moist, and later check for the start of top growth.
- Blooming of the pots can be staggered by bringing them out of the cool area at different times.
- Some cool places to store your bulbs include a cold cellar, an unheated garage, or in a plastic bag in your refrigerator.
- After the top growth has started, move the bulbs into a cool room with a temperature between 55 and 65°F or 15°C and good indirect light for 2 weeks.
- They can then be placed in a bright, warm location to bring on bloom.
- Water the pots regularly.
- Early blooming bulbs such as crocus, daffodils, early tulips, and hyacinths will come into bloom most readily through forcing. Late bloomers may not give as good results.

Aftercare

- Once the blooms are finished, cut off the flower stems but leave the green leaves, and these can be put outside in a cool sunny spot.
- Gradually decrease the water given to them until the leaves die off and the bulbs go dormant.
- They can then be stored in a well-ventilated, cool cellar so that they can be transplanted into the garden in the fall. However, they will not produce good blooms for a couple of seasons.

