



Forcing Bulbs Indoors

Create Spring in your house any time with a beautiful forced bulb!

Brightly colored tulips and hyacinths are the first sign of spring, and are anxiously anticipated after our Northern Arizona winters. But you don't have to wait for spring to enjoy beautiful indoor blooms! Many spring blooming bulbs can easily be forced indoors to brighten the dark, cold, gray days of winter.

"Forcing" is simply coaxing bulbs to bloom out of season, by replicating and speeding up the process they go through naturally out of doors. When you follow this simple guide, you could have Spring blooming bulbs in your home continuously (in succession) from January all the way into May.

When selecting bulbs for forcing, select firm, good sized bulbs that do not have blemishes. (Shop with confidence at Warner's, with our selection of quality bulbs that have been handled properly from our supplier to your shopping bag).

Timing is the most difficult part of forcing bulbs. Most spring flowering bulbs require a period of about 12 to 15 weeks at temperatures between 40° to 45°F in order to produce a good root system. Once the root system is established, you will bring your bulbs into warmer temperatures, where they will bloom in about 3 to 4 weeks. Therefore, allow a total period of 15 weeks from planting to flowering.

Use the timetable below as a guideline to help you plan your forcing schedule. Remember that these can vary, and it is easier to slow the process down than to speed it up. Exceptions to this guideline are **amaryllis** and **paperwhite narcissus**, which have been pre-chilled and therefore do not require time for rooting.

For Blooms in	Plant your bulbs in
January	September or very early October.
February	early-to-mid October.
March	late October or early November

Storing Bulbs (prior to the forcing process)

Bare bulbs can be stored for several weeks in your refrigerator prior to potting without damage if they are packed properly. The best way to store them is in a mesh bag or paper bag with holes that permit ventilation. You don't have to worry about water, as the humidity inside a refrigerator is usually high enough. Check them periodically to make sure they are not molding or drying out.

This storage is not part of the rooting period. Remove your bulbs from the fridge and pot them up according to the timetable above, and following the directions below.

Potting Bulbs for Rooting

In addition to high quality bulbs, you will need a well-drained potting soil (we recommend **Warner's Custom Potting Soil**) and a suitable container. The container can be made of plastic, clay, ceramic, or metal; but must be clean and have good drainage holes in the bottom.

Potting Instructions:

1. Partially fill the container with potting soil (about 2").
2. Place the bulb on top of soil in the pot, then place (don't push) bulbs into position. *The top of the bulb is the pointed side, called the nose, and the flat side is the bottom, referred to as the root plate.*
3. Add enough soil to fill the pot, firming the soil gently around the bulbs; but being careful not to bruise them. Do not cover the bulbs with soil, but allow the nose to peek out above the potting soil. For ease of watering, the soil should be ½" to 1" below the rim of the container.
4. Water well in order to settle the soil around the bulbs.

Bulbs can be planted very close together, even touching, and make the best show in crowded arrangements. However, different types of bulbs have different rooting times; therefore it is not advisable to combine different types of bulbs in the same pot. Label each pot with the name of the variety, planting date, and the date you intend to bring it out of storage for forcing.

Store the potted bulb in a cold, dark location for the rooting period. Suitable locations include a root cellar, outdoor trench, or the refrigerator; or any location where the temperature ranges from 40° to 45°F and there is complete darkness. (Remember, this rooting period is not necessary for amaryllis or narcissus bulbs.)

Forcing Blooms

The actual “forcing” of your bulbs begins when you move them from the root growing environment into warmth and light; triggering the growth of leaves and flowers. Sunshine and temperature are the most important for successful flowering.

1. After the rooting period has passed and you see little yellow shoots in your bulbs, transfer them indoors to a location with indirect (low to medium) sunlight and cool temperatures, about 50° to 60°F for 4 to 5 days.
2. When your shoots have turned green, move the pots to a bright, sunny, warm location to stimulate blooming. A temperature of about 60° to 70°F and direct sunlight will produce the best results.
3. Turn your containers regularly to encourage straight, even growth and keep your bulbs well watered during this growth period.
4. When the buds take on color, return the plants to indirect sunlight to make the blossoms last. Keep the soil moist at all times.

If blossoms begin to develop too quickly, you may be able to retard blooming a bit by moving the pots out of direct sunlight and into a cooler location. Re-acclimate them to sunlight and warmer temperatures when you want them to resume growing.

After blooming, hardy bulbs such as hyacinths and tulips cannot be forced again and should be discarded or planted outdoors where they may re-bloom within a year or two.

Easy Paperwhite Narcissus and Amaryllis Bulbs

Paperwhites (narcissus tazetta) and amaryllis are among the most popular forcing flowers that do not require the 12-week rooting period. (They have been pre-chilled). They are easy to start and can give you indoor blooms from Thanksgiving until late March, if planted successively, batch after batch, in late fall.

Paperwhites can be potted in shallow containers of gravel or decorative stones. Place the bulbs on a layer of gravel and carefully place them onto the stones, pushing them down just far enough so the bulbs are supported in an upright position. You can put several paperwhites together; a crowded grouping is quite attractive.

Add water to the container, just to the base of the bulbs; but not covering them (it will cause the bulbs to rot).

Amaryllis bulbs can be potted the same as other spring bulbs, as indicated above.

Instead of the long rooting period, you will only need to leave amaryllis or paperwhites in a cool, dark place for one to two weeks. When the roots have begun to take hold, and the plant has sprung from the bulb, take the pot out into a brightly lit room. Four to six weeks later, you will have beautiful, fragrant spring blooms.

After blooming, cut the flower and stem off, but do not remove the leaves. Place them in a sunny window and transplant them outdoors when the weather permits. It will take 2 to 3 years, but they will bloom again.

Easiest bulbs for Forcing

Paperwhite Narcissus: Popular bulb, grows in soil or gravel. No cooling period necessary.

Amaryllis: Popular Christmas plant – plant in November, no cooling necessary.

Large-flowering Crocus: Requires 14 week rooting period. Bulbs can be potted in gravel and water for differing effect.

Hyacinth: Fragrant springtime favorite. Requires about 12 weeks for rooting. Can be forced in special “hyacinth” vases using only water.

Muscari: Requires 16 week rooting time. Pot plenty, they’re small!

Iris: Especially iris reticulate are easy to force, but need careful attention to drainage. Require about 15 weeks for rooting. Don’t hold the bulb too long before potting. Tall-stemmed iris are less suited to forcing.