

YEAR ROUND GARDENING

Forcing Bulbs

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Amaryllis are popular flowering bulbs with spectacular blooms. The trumpet-shaped flowers can be as large as 8 to 10 inches across and are produced atop an 18- to 30-inch-tall flower stalk. Flower colors include red, pink, orange, salmon, white, and bi-colors. Single-flowering, double-flowering, and miniature amaryllis varieties are available.



Bulbs can be purchased pre-planted in pots or unpotted. When purchasing amaryllis, choose large, solid bulbs; they usually produce 2 or 3 flower stalks.

Select a pot which is approximately 1 to 2 inches wider than the diameter of the bulb. The container may be clay, ceramic or plastic, but should have drainage holes in the bottom. Plant the bulb in a well-drained potting soil. Add a small amount of potting soil in the bottom of the pot. Center the bulb in the middle of the pot. Then add additional potting soil, firming it around the roots and bulb. When finished potting, the upper one-half of the bulb should remain above the soil surface. Also, leave about one inch between the soil surface and the pot's rim. Water well and place in a warm (70 to 75 degree) location.

Allow the soil to dry somewhat before watering again. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. When growth appears, move the plant to a sunny window and apply a water-soluble fertilizer every 2 to 4 weeks. During flower stalk elongation, turn the pot each day to keep the flower stalk growing straight. Flower stalks that lean badly may need staking.

Flowering usually occurs about 6 to 8 weeks after potting. When the amaryllis begins to bloom, move the plant to a slightly cooler location that doesn't receive direct sun to prolong the life of the flowers. After the flowers fade, cut off the flower stalk with a sharp knife. Make the cut 1 to 2 inches above the bulb. Don't damage the foliage. In order for the bulb to bloom again next season, the plant must replenish its depleted food reserves. The strap-like leaves manufacture food for the plant. Place the plant in a

sunny window and water when the soil surface is nearly dry. Fertilize every 2 to 4 weeks with a houseplant fertilizer.

Hyacinths and paperwhite narcissus can be grown without potting mix. Hyacinths are often grown in special glass containers shaped to hold a single bulb, but any container with a neck narrow enough to suspend a bulb over water will work. Paperwhite narcissus bulbs can be grown on sand, gravel, pebbles or marbles. For hyacinths and paperwhite narcissus, add water to the container, keeping the water just below the bottom of the bulbs. If water touches the bulbs they will rot.

Tulips, crocus, daffodils and grape hyacinth can also be forced to grow indoors. They will need potting mix and a period of cool temperatures of 40 degrees. These bulbs can be stored in your refrigerator but be sure apples and other fruit are not in the refrigerator.

With tulips, the tip of the bulb should protrude over the soil line. Daffodils will grow best if half the bulb is above the soil line. It takes 6 to 8 weeks for the bulbs to begin growing. None of the bulbs mentioned need additional fertilizer.

6 tips for success:

1. Choose healthy, high quality bulbs with no soft spots.
2. Always plant in a well-drained potting medium such as a blend of sphagnum peat, perlite and vermiculite.
3. The container needs to have drainage holes.
4. Water to keep the plant medium moist, but not sopping wet.
5. Until bulbs show signs of growth, keep them in a cool, dark location of 40 degrees.

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