



## *Time and Hints to Take Home*

### Forcing Bulbs

Imagine it is January. The snow is deep outside and the air is cold. The days are shorter and some days it seems like you leave in the dark and come home in the dark. Wouldn't a bit of flowering spring feel good to come home to? With just a little planning this fall, you can open your door to hyacinths, tulips or daffodils blooming every day in the house!!

Getting bulbs such as tulips, daffodils or hyacinths to bloom indoors during winter is a straightforward process that requires fooling the bulbs into thinking they are out passing the days in winter cold. Each of these bulbs requires a specific amount of chilling time in order to produce their flowers. That is why we plant them in the fall to come up and flower in spring. However, they do not need all the days of winter we get nor do they need such cold temperatures. You can meet their needs inside your home. For most bulbs, the temperature inside a refrigerator, about 35-40°F is plenty cold. Spots around your house that get cold but do not freeze hard such as attic stairwells attached garages and unheated basements work just fine too. They do not need any light to come up. You have to pot the bulbs up in soil the appropriate number of weeks ahead of when you want them to flower.

Bulbs perform ideally if the following temperature needs and timing are met. The temperature for all bulbs should be between 35-40°F for the full number of weeks required for each type of bulb. Please note, if you want to have plants for the Christmas holidays, you will need to use your refrigerator since it will not be cold enough in most attics or crawl spaces when those bulbs need chilling.

Daffodil bulbs need 12-14 weeks of chilling. Tulips need 14-16 weeks of chilling and Hyacinths take the longest at 18 weeks of chilling. You need to look at your calendar and decide when you

want them to flower and figure back the correct number of weeks to determine when you need to pot them. Keep in mind that all bulbs need to be taken out of chilling about 2 weeks before you want them to flower to allow the leaves and flowers to develop. You need to add this in when you figure out when to plant the bulbs. If you want to stagger your flower displays, you need to stagger your planting. We suggest you mark your calendar so you remember to take the bulbs out of chilling on time.

Pot your bulbs at least 4" deep in potting soil that will drain well. You can plant as deep as 8" for big bulbs like hyacinths. In pots, you can put bulbs 'cheek to cheek'; they will not mind being crowded. Water them in thoroughly and put them in your cold spot. They do not need light at this time. Check your pots weekly for water and keep the soil barely moist and never soggy. Typically, after 8 weeks or so, your bulbs will come up through the soil. Keep them in your cool spot for the correct number of weeks. They may appear pale without light but will green up quickly when you take them out. When they are about two weeks from flowering, move them to a warm and bright spot in the house. Keep them well watered. The flower display will last longer in a spot out of direct sunlight and with temperatures below 70°F. When your bulbs are through flowering, keep them in their pots until the leaves have faded out. Then cut the leaves down and put the pots back in their cool spot until late summer when you can harvest the bulbs to plant out in the yard. Do not try to force bulbs a second time. It is hard on them and they need a full year to recover and that is something they will do best right in the yard.

### Hyacinth Vases

Hyacinth bulbs can also be forced in water if

they are chilled properly before hand. Simply put the hyacinth bulbs in a paper bag and put them in the refrigerator for 12 weeks. Be sure not to store them with vegetables or fruits that give off ripening gases. It can cause rot. When the time is up, put the bulbs in the special hyacinth forcing glasses, available at Plant Land. Keep the water fresh and just touching the bottom of the bulb. Put them on a sunny windowsill and just wait!

## Paperwhites

Other types of bulbs such as Paperwhites and amaryllis do not need chilling to flower. Paperwhites are the easiest of all. They need only 4-6 weeks potted up to produce flowers. They will perform better if they are kept in a cool dark place for the first 3-4 weeks. The stalks will be shorter and sturdier if they are allowed to develop in cool, dark conditions. Once Paperwhites finish flowering, they are done. They cannot be planted outside here nor can they be re-forced. A very detailed tip sheet for Paperwhites is available at Plant Land along with our grade #1 bulbs, the biggest and best on the market.

## Amaryllis

Amaryllis on the other hand, can be kept as long-term houseplants and forced to bloom reliably every year about holiday time. Amaryllis are natives of South Africa and need a long dry period just before flowering to be tricked into blooming. When you get an Amaryllis bulb, pot it in a pot that is no more than 1" bigger than the bulb. Pot it so the top half of the bulb is out of the potting mix. Use a soil mix that drains well. Water it in well and then do not water it again

until green starts to appear at the top of the bulb. Move it to a sunny spot and water it regularly. Depending on the species, it may produce leaves and then the flower stalk or vice versa. When it is done flowering, cut the flower stalk down to the base but do not cut the leaves. This should happen with the following approximate timing: September to October, pot bulb. November to December, flowers appear. January to March, flowers fade. After this point, cut off only the flower stem and treat the leaves like a houseplant. Give them enough water to prevent drying out and keep the pot in good light. Those leaves are recharging the bulb. About August 1<sup>st</sup>, take the plant and place it in a dark, dry spot. An attic stairwell, a closet or spare rooms are good choices. It needs a little benign neglect at this point. Do not water the plant. Let the leaves wither and die. Keep the plant in this long dry period, (you are recreating the long dry period of its South African home) until about November 1<sup>st</sup>. Then bring the Amaryllis out, put it in good sunlight and start watering it. It will reward you every year with new flowers just in time for Christmas. Care for it the same way every year. It is helpful to mark the calendar in advance if you are serious about timing your Amaryllis for the holidays.

If the winter gets you down, try some bulbs for flowering color every year. They can be very good medicine for even the worst cabin fever. Plant Land carries all the bulbs plus all the soil mixes and pots you need. Come see us for more good advice on bulb forcing!!