

# FORCING SPRING BULBS

Spring flowers are a bright addition to any home. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, crocus, and other bulbs can be forced into mid-winter bloom. There is no actual forcing, but rather the bulbs receive their cold treatment early and are allowed to bloom out of season. In the fall, the bulbs should be planted anytime from early October through mid-November. Give the bulbs a cool treatment and then bring them into a warmer area to be forced into bloom.

## Planting

Select a shallow container with drainage holes. Previously used pots should be washed in soapy water and rinsed with a 10% bleach solution. Bulbs should not be buried deeply, but planted so that the tips of the bulbs are slightly exposed. Place the bulbs close together. Allow ½ to 1" of space at the top of the pot for watering. No fertilizing is necessary. Water the bulbs thoroughly after planting. The pot should not require frequent watering, but it must never completely dry out. Some bulbs, especially tulips have a flat side. This side will produce the first and largest leaf. For best display results, place the flat side to the outer edge of the pot so the foliage will cover the edge and the flower stems will cluster together in the center.

## Cold Treatment

Place the pot in a dark, cool (40 degrees is ideal) area for 10-15 weeks. Corner of a basement, unheated garage or a second refrigerator are good choices for controlled temperature and darkness. As long as the pots are in the dark and are not allowed to dry out or freeze, the area should work.

## Forcing

Many bulbs planted in October 1<sup>st</sup> should be ready for forcing immediately after Christmas. Bring the pots into a cool (50-60 F) site that is bright but not into direct light to stimulate shoot elongation. As the shoots

develop, the pots can be moved to a warmer site. When the flower buds are showing color, move the pots to a cooler location at night. Hyacinths may have a problem with the flower stem not elongating. Place plants in the dark or cover them (paper bags work great if it will fit) for a few days. The stems should elongate and buds form.

## Forcing in Water

Paper white narcissus bulbs can be forced in water. These bulbs should be anchored in small pebbles or in special bulb vases. The upper cup of the glass keeps the bulb dry and allows the roots to grow into the water in the lower compartment. Bulbs in shallow pans filled with pebbles must be securely placed to prevent the container from tipping when the stems and flowers develop.

## Care

Each pot of flowers should last a week to 10 days if treated properly. Best results will be achieved by placing them in a cool location, watered, and kept out of direct sunlight.

