



FORCING BULBS For WINTER BLOOM

SELECTING BULBS

Causing a plant to bloom at a time or under conditions that are not natural is called forcing. The most common bulbs for forcing are tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and crocuses. Choose varieties that are marked “good for forcing”. Select large, firm bulbs that are uniform in size and free from mold and serious blemishes. If you do not plant the bulbs right away, store them in paper bags in a cool place (5°C - 10°C) such as the fridge. Paperwhites and “pre-cooled” bulbs can be planted and forced right away. If you do put pre-cooled bulbs into cold storage, the length of the cold treatment period will be significantly reduced.

PLANTING

The planting medium anchors the bulbs and holds moisture for rooting. The bulbs contain enough food for the developing flowers and should not be fertilized. The planting mix must provide excellent drainage to prevent the bulbs from rotting. A good mix to use is equal parts of soil, peat moss and sharp sand. Containers should be shallow and not too large. Plan to have about 6 daffodils, 6 tulips, 3 hyacinths or 15 crocuses per pot. Do not mix different bulbs in a pot. Fill each pot about one half to one third with soil mix. Set the bulbs right side up on the mix so that they are close but not touching. The tops of the bulbs should be level with the rim of the pot. Place tulip bulbs so that the flat side faces outward – the first leaf of each bulb will then face outward creating a uniform appearance. Fill in around the bulbs with more mix. Tulips can be completely covered with up to 25 mm of mix. Daffodils and hyacinths should have the neck of the bulb showing above the soil. Water the soil mix thoroughly.

COLD TREATMENT

All hardy bulbs need a cooling period in order to produce leaves and flowers. A cool garage, a cold storeroom or an old refrigerator will do, as long as you can keep the temperature between 5°C and 10°C. It should also be dark so it may be necessary to cover the pots. During the cooling period the plants are forming roots, so keep the pots moist. Check weekly to see if they need watering. The length of the cold treatment will vary depending on the actual temperature of the cold treatment, any “Pre-cooling” treatment, the type of bulb and the variety (there are early and late varieties of tulips especially). Twelve weeks or more is generally required. You can begin the final stage of forcing when roots are growing out the bottom of the pot and about 5 cm of top growth is visible.

FORCING THE BLOOMS

When the period of cold treatment is over the bulbs can be brought out of storage. Initially temperatures should be cool and light subdued. When the flower buds are visible the pots can be brought into more light, although keeping them cool will help prolong flowering. It takes about 3 or 4 weeks to force blooms once the plants have been removed from cold storage. If you are targeting a specific date for flowering, you can manipulate the blooming period somewhat by altering temperature and light. Blooms will be delayed by moving the pots to a cool place out of direct sunlight. Warm temperatures and high light will speed up development. Bulbs cannot be forced a second time and are usually discarded after the flowers have faded. If they are hardy for this area you can grow them on indoors after flowering, allowing them to mature and ripen. After the leaves have yellowed and died back completely, remove them from the pot and store in a dry place until planting time the following September.