

# Forcing Bulbs for the February Flower Show

Many bulbs that normally bloom outside in early spring can be made to bloom in the dead of winter while the snow is still flying outside. "Forcing" is the term that refers to making plants bloom out of season.

Bulbs that are commonly used to force include amaryllis, crocuses, hyacinths, irises, narcissus & tulips. Fall is the time to prepare them by potting them and giving them a cold treatment to simulate winter. To accomplish this, store the potted bulbs in a cold, dark place for 9 to 12 weeks.

To pot up the bulbs use either plastic or clay pots that have drainage holes in the bottom. Smaller bulbs in 4 to 6 inch pots and larger one in 6 to 10 inch pots. Fill the pots with soil so that when the bulbs are placed in the soil, they will be slightly below the rim of the pot. Plant bulbs close, but not touching. Fill soil over and around bulbs leaving the top 1/3 of the bulb exposed. The exception is crocus and iris which should be covered with about 1/2 inch of soil. Be sure to label each pot. Finally water thoroughly and allow to drain.

Now comes the tricky part, finding a spot that is cool enough, but will not go much below freezing. If you are lucky enough to have a root cellar or an extra refrigerator store the pots there. Otherwise, you can sometimes use the top of the stairs of a bulkhead or an attic, even a closet in a cool room could be adequate. Check the pots occasionally to be sure they do not dry out.

After the allotted time of cold treatment, bring the bulbs into a room about 60 degrees and dimly lit for a few days for a transition into a final spot in a greenhouse or a spot in the sun. They will grow amazingly fast and become green quickly. If needed, place a few stakes around the stalks to keep them from flopping over. Below is a chart that will help you determine the specific needs of individual bulbs.

- Amaryllis - pot in dry soil at 50 to 60 degrees for 8 to 12 weeks - grow in bright light at 65 to 75 degrees
- Caladium - boxed in dry peat moss at 50 to 60 degrees for 8 to 12 weeks - grow in limited light at 65 to 75 degrees with high humidity
- Crocus – potted in moist soil at 35 to 48 degrees for 15 to 16 weeks - grow in bright light At 65 to 75 degrees
- Hyacinths - potted in moist soil at 35 to 48 degrees for 13 to 15 weeks - grow in bright light at 65 to 75 degrees
- Iris – potted in moist soil at 35 to 48 degrees for 15 to 16 weeks – grow in bright light at 65 to 75 degrees
- Lilium - potted in moist peat moss at 40 to 45 degrees for 6 weeks - grow in bright light At 65 to 75 degrees
- Narcissus - potted in moist soil at 40 to 48 degrees for 13 to 15 weeks - grow in bright light at 65 to 75 degrees
- Tulipa – potted in moist soil at 40 to 48 degrees for 13 to 15 weeks – grow in bright light at 65 to 75 degrees

Good luck!