

Spring into gardening this winter

Question: I've seen pictures of beautiful spring flowers blooming indoors in the dead of winter. How can I get bulbs to do that?

Answer: This is the perfect time to start "forcing" spring bulbs for winter flowering indoors. "Forcing" is simply causing the plant to bloom during a time when it is normally dormant. There's nothing like a windowsill with a pot of tulips or paper white narcissus to brighten up a winter-weary mood.

Any spring bulb can be forced, so you can choose from a wide variety of tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, crocus or amaryllis, for example. It's best not to mix bulb types, as they have different rooting requirements and dates of flowering. Choose large bulbs that are firm and without blemish.

Since they need a period

of chilling, check instructions that come with the bulbs for precise temperatures and lengths of time required to bloom. If the bulbs are not pre-chilled, either place them in a paper bag in the refrigerator until you're ready to pot them, or set them close together in shallow layers in a container.

Usually six tulip bulbs, three hyacinths, six daffodils or 15 crocus will fit into a 6-inch pot. With tulips, place the flat side of the tulip bulb next to the pot rim since the largest leaf will emerge on that side, creating a more desirable-looking pot. Place the pot in a cool, dark place—such as an unheated garage or basement—at 33 to 45 degrees for eight to 15 weeks, depending on the type of bulb.

Containers should be 6 inches deep and 6 to 8 inches across with bottom drain holes. Use any commercial potting

soil mix or bulbs can be planted in pebbles and water. Plant the bulbs so that their "noses" are exposed, not buried, except in the case of crocus or snowdrops—which should be barely covered. Keep slightly damp during chilling. When shoots are 1 to 2 inches, place them in a bright, cool (60-degree) area. When 6 inches tall, move them to a bright, sunny window, where they'll receive at least eight hours of light with warm room temperatures.

When chilling and after chilling, water well to stimulate growth, but don't let the soil be soaked.

Bulbs will flower within two to four weeks after bringing them indoors and should last from seven to 10 days. Moving the pot to a cooler area each night will prolong the blooms.

Once the blooms are spent, water less frequently until the green

leaves wither. At that point, stop all watering and let them dry out, storing them in a dark, dry place until the following autumn, when they can be planted outdoors in the garden. Bulbs that have been forced cannot be forced again and may require a few seasons before they will bloom.

Forcing spring bulbs indoors is fun and relatively easy. It's also a great way to introduce children to the wonder of growing bulbs and makes great gifts.

Do you have a gardening question? Please e-mail, call or visit the Douglas County Master Gardener Plant Clinic at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu, 541-672-4461 or 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.



PIXABAY

Now is a good time to start "forcing" spring bulbs for winter flowering indoors.