



Plan Now for Indoor Spring Flowers

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It's six months away, but it's time to plan for spring. If you would like to fill your home with pots of beautiful spring flowers next February and March you have to take action in October or November. Forcing spring bulbs is easy to do and far less expensive than buying pots of flowers from retail establishments that do the growing for you.

To get started all you need are some pots, a bag of potting soil, and some bulbs. The flowers that are normally grown (forced) are hyacinths, daffodils (narcissus), and tulips. All of these are planted the same way. Put a bottom layer of soil in the pot and place the big end of the bulb down on this layer. The tip of the bulb should be about an inch from the top rim of the pot. Now fill the pot with soil mixture, just barely covering the tip of the bulb. Water thoroughly. Hyacinth bulbs can be planted one or more to a pot, but daffodils and tulips look best if a group of four or five or more are grown in each container. Use top size bulbs for best results, inexpensive small bulbs are usable in outside gardens but won't do well for inside forcing.

Now that you've got the bulbs potted, it's time to find a dark, cool place that will stay between 40° and 50° for about twelve weeks. Unheated garages, cellars, and cellarways are good spots, and some folks use cold frames with mulch cover for this process. At these temperatures, the bulbs will root through the soil mixture and be ready for flowering in the spring. Freezing stops the rooting process, so check your bulbs on occasion for this problem and also water them when the soil dries out. After twelve weeks, roots should be showing through the drainage holes in the bottom of the pot and a small amount of growth may start on top. Bring your pots of bulbs out of storage by starting with a cool room (60° if you have one) for a week or so. After that, a nice light room at normal temperatures will bring your bulbs into bloom. If you have a choice, keep your pots in a cool room as the flowers will last longer. I usually prepare about twenty pots of bulbs each fall so that I can bring out two or three pots a week and keep a steady supply of flowers growing all spring long.

What should you grow? Hyacinths top my list. They are almost foolproof and most varieties will fill a room with great fragrance when in bloom. You can mix two or three colors in one pot for interesting color combinations. Most daffodils can be forced easily but some do better than others. Check catalogs or labels for notations such as "good for forcing". The tulips

that are usually forced are in the single early group. Not all of these varieties are recommended for forcing, so again check the labels.

Because your bulbs are growing indoors, they will grow taller than normal. Give them as much light as possible and have some stakes available for flower support if needed. If you plan on planting these bulbs outdoors afterwards, cut the dead flowers off and keep watering until the foliage dries up. Most gardeners don't bother with tulips but most hyacinths and daffodils will make a comeback in a year or two. Forcing spring bulbs is an easy process but you have to plant now if you want to enjoy the flowers next spring.

The Master Gardener Program is conducted throughout the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension. Master Gardeners are volunteers with years of gardening experience who share their knowledge with others after completing a training program.

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