
Bulbs for Winter Bloom

The trees have all dropped their leaves and our gardens are covered by a blanket of snow. It is too cold to grow flowers outside, but you can easily turn a sunny windowsill into an inside garden. Paperwhite Narcissus and Amaryllis bulbs both produce beautiful flowers. They are easy bulbs to grow inside a house.

Paperwhites come in two colors, white and yellow. They are extremely easy to grow; even someone with a black thumb can have success with them. All you need is a shallow dish and some gravel. Put a layer of gravel into your container. Then place several Paperwhite bulbs on the gravel. Carefully place more gravel around the bulbs, but do not cover them up. The top third or top half of the Paperwhites should still be uncovered. Give the bulbs some water (up to the top of the gravel) and add more as the level goes down. In five to six weeks you will have a beautiful display of fragrant flowers. After they are done blooming, just throw them away.

Amaryllis bulbs are more expensive to buy than Paperwhites. With just a little bit of care they can last for years. They come in several different colors: red, white, pink and peach. There are even striped varieties, red and white and pink and white. Plant your bulb in a 6 to 8 inch pot in regular potting soil. Leave the top one third of the bulb uncovered. Water sparingly at first until you see it starting to grow. It takes about eight weeks for an Amaryllis to bloom.

After it is done blooming, cut the flower off at the base of the stalk. Continue to grow it and you will have a nice leafy green houseplant. Be sure to water it regularly and fertilize once a month with a houseplant fertilizer. In the summer you can move the plant outdoors; it can even be planted in the ground and then dug up in the fall. To get the plant to rebloom, stop watering it in September or October. Take it out of direct sunlight, let the leaves die and cut them off. Let the bulb rest for at least six weeks. After the Amaryllis has rested, replot it in fresh potting soil, place it in a sunny location and watch it grow.

As the bulb gets older, it will start to make baby bulbs. For an absolutely beautiful show of flowers, don't remove the babies, just let them grow. You will have to start using a bigger pot to accommodate the larger plant, but instead of just one bulb flowering, you will have several flower stalks blooming at the same time.

So don't let the thought of winter put you down in the dumps. Just start an indoor flower garden with some Paperwhites and Amaryllis bulbs. It is fun to watch them grow and the flowers will make you smile.

Call the UNH Cooperative Extension's Education Center's Info-Line toll free at 1-877-398-4769 for "Practical Solutions to Everyday Questions." Trained volunteers are available to answer your questions Monday through Friday from 9:00am to 2:00pm.

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