

Bulbs for indoors

There are a variety of ways you can grow bulbs for use in pots indoors and it is a great way to shake off the winter and bring spring into your home.

Bulbs most commonly used indoors are prepared hyacinths, paperwhite Narcissi and Amaryllis. However, other bulbs, such as smaller tulips, Crocus, Iris reticulata and Narcissi such as 'Tete-a-Tete' and 'February Gold' also look good in bowls indoors

Suitable bulbs (ie those that would normally be planted outdoors such as Crocus, Tulips, Iris reticulata and most Narcissi) may be planted in containers and left outdoors until they are coming into flower and then simply brought into a cool room (eg hall or conservatory) to cheer up the house in the spring. Alternatively, the bulbs may be 'forced' to get them into flower early. In some cases the bulb supplier has already started this process and these are known as 'prepared' bulbs – eg prepared hyacinths. Forcing bulbs to get them to flower earlier involves giving them a period of cold (no more the 9°C) in a dark place (eg a garage or cellar). Alternatively the bowl may be plunged under a 6" layer of sharp sand or moist peat in a cold frame or at the base of a north-facing wall. The length of time required is dependent on the type of bulb. Prepared hyacinths need a period of 10 weeks or so. If they are planted in September they will flower in time for Christmas. Tulips require a period of between 13-17 weeks (earliest flowering would be mid-January) and Narcissi a period of 12-16 weeks, depending on variety (earliest flowering in mid-January).

When planting, ensure sufficient drainage in the pots and the bulbs should have enough compost for their roots to develop (about 10cm minimum). Use proper bulb fibre for best results. This will have additives such as charcoal to stop the growing medium going 'sour'. It also has the right balance of nutrients for bulbs and tends to have better drainage.

Plant bulbs so that the 'noses' are just visible above the compost. Each pot should be watered well and allowed to drain. Check the bowls occasionally to see if the compost is still moist, watering as required. After the required period of cold, when the shoots are just showing above the surface of the compost the bulbs may be brought into a cool, well lit room to flower.

Neither Paperwhite Narcissi nor Amaryllis require a cold period. Paperwhites flower only 6-8 weeks after planting. Amaryllis is also easy to bring into flower and can look absolutely spectacular – large bulbs can produce 12 or more flower heads.

Scented bulbs (Hyacinths, Paperwhites and other Tazetta Narcissi, Jonquil Narcissi etc) are wonderful for conservatories, which are brighter and often cooler than the rest of the house, so the flowers tend to be longer lived.

Ideal bulbs for the living room include Hyacinths and Paperwhite Narcissi and, for later flowering, tulips and other Narcissi. Crocuses and Muscari are better in cooler areas of the house.

Choose colours and types of bulbs that compliment your décor and style of home. Amaryllis, for example, can look either stately or contemporary, depending upon what colour you pick. White is a good colour for a contemporary home. Deep red can look very classic and elegant. It also depends upon the bowl you choose for planting – depending upon the type of bowl bulbs can look either classic, pretty/traditional, or contemporary, so consider the look you want to create at the time of purchase.

For further tips on growing bulbs the new Bulb Expert is an excellent reference book.