

MAKE THE INDOORS BLOOM THIS WINTER

Winter seems to leave gardeners with a little extra time on their hands and if you are a go-getter you may be interested in working with paperwhite bulbs during the slowdown.

Paperwhite (narcissus) are actually one of the easiest bulbs to force indoors. They can be forced for cut flowers or ornamental displays. Anytime from December to March is the appropriate time to take on the challenge.

Paperwhites are actually a form of daffodil that can be forced into bloom without a chilling period which makes them very user friendly.

There are many seed/bulb companies that sell paperwhite bulbs, so a little research will lead you to a nearby source.

To force a paperwhite, simply fill a pot of choice with one to two inches of potting soil and then position the bulbs in the soil with the pointed end up. Continue to add potting soil so that only the top half of the bulb is exposed, then water and continue to keep moist. If using soil be sure to use a container with a drain hole to avoid rotting the bulb.

Paperwhites can also be forced in shallow decorative containers (without drainage holes) with pebbles and water. Start with a layer of pebbles and the situate the bulbs in the layer. Continue to add pebbles around the bulbs to secure them in place. Once the bulbs are in place add just enough water to cover the bases of the bulbs where the roots join thebulb. Check daily and add water to maintain this level. Bulbs may rot if the water level is too high.

Place the pot or container with bulbs in a bright, cool room until the shoots are one to two inches tall. Then move the container to a warmer location. No fertilizer is needed to force paperwhites.

Be sure to allow four weeks between the time you pot up your bulbs and the time you want them to bloom. For a continuous show of color, start new pots of bulbs every couple of weeks throughout fall and winter. They bloom only once, so discard bulbs after they have flowered.

One common complaint with paperwhite bulbs that are started in a warm room is that they have a tendency to become leggy and the leaves flop over. This problem I learned can be solved with a fairly simple remedy. Simply water the bulbs with a dilute solution of four to six percent alcohol once shoots reach a length of two inches. Rubbing alcohol is preferred and a 5 percent solution can be mixed by using 13 parts water to 1 part rubbing alcohol.