

Deck the Halls with Holiday Bulb Flowers



WARNER'S
NURSERY

Your guide to “forcing” Amaryllis and Paperwhite blooms for the holidays

There are certain details that cue the coming of the holiday season: Christmas tree sales, sugar cookie scented candles, and floral details like poinsettias, amaryllis, and paperwhites (also known as narcissus).

This season, cultivate your own decor and learn how to “force” your amaryllis and paperwhite bulbs to bloom in time to be the centerpiece of your festivities.

Actually, it’s “coaxing” not “forcing”

Forcing bulbs is the term used to describe the process that stimulates bulbs to bloom out of season. Among the most commonly forced bulb flowers are amaryllis, paperwhite narcissus, muscari, and hyacinths.

Paperwhites

Paperwhites are most often (and most easily) potted in shallow containers of gravel or decorative stones.

Place bulbs on a layer of gravel and carefully fill in enough gravel to hold bulbs but not cover them, or place onto stones, pushing them down just far enough so the bulbs are supported in an upright position. Put several of them together. A crowded grouping is the most attractive.



Add water to the container. It should reach the base of the bulbs, but not touch the bulbs. Put your bulb in a dark place for a couple of weeks to allow adequate roots to develop. 4 to 6 weeks after that, your paperwhites will be in bloom.

TIP: Plant new batches every 2 to 3 weeks for continuous blooms all winter!



Amaryllis

Unlike most other bulbs, amaryllis will bloom again and again, provided proper care.

Start with a large bulb, about 11 inches, and make sure that it does not have any mold or spots. A healthy bulb will ensure lots of support for the flowering.

If you are working with a dormant bulb, be sure to allow ample time for the bulb to flower, typically 10-12 weeks before your desired bloom date. Keep the bulb cool until it's time to plant it. Unlike most bulbs, amaryllis does not need a "chill period."

Plant your amaryllis in a pot just large enough to accommodate the bulb. The soil should be well-draining to prevent root rot. Make sure there is a couple of inches of soil beneath the bulb, and that about a third of the bulb is above the soil line.

Water right after planting, ensuring the excess moisture is draining. Then put in a dark place (like a cupboard) for a couple of weeks so the root structure to develop.

After that, your amaryllis will need bright, indirect light and an ideal temperature for successful forcing, typically around 70 to 75 degrees.



How to Keep Your Amaryllis Blooming

TIPS for seasoned amaryllis growers:

If you are working with a bulb from the summer, cut off the flower stalk close to the base after it finishes blooming.

Keep the plant moist and add houseplant fertilizer regularly. Stop watering and feeding in August/September, and allow the plant to dry out completely in the sun.

In early fall, remove the clean bulbs of old scales and dead foliage. Roots should be fleshy and not damaged.

Re-pot in a clean container with the neck of the bulb above the soil, water, and place in a cool, sunny spot.

Water sparingly until the first sprout appears, then keep moist. In about 8 weeks, the bulb will bloom again.