

Spring Forward with Bulbs

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Bulbs and Times for Forcing (Here are some bulbs that can be forced for winter bloom)

Plant	Weeks of Cold Needed	Weeks to Bloom
Crocus (Crocus spp. & cvs.)	15	2-3
Daffodils (Narcissus cvs.)	15-17	2-3
Fritillaries (Fritillaria meleagris & cvs.)	15	3
Glory of the snow (Chionodoxa luciliae & cvs.)	15	2-3
Grape hyacinths (Muscaria spp. & cvs.)	13-15	2-3
Irises (Iris reticulata & cvs.)	15	2-3
Paperwhites (Narcissus papyraceus & cvs.)	None	3-5
Scillas (Scilla siberica & cvs.)	15	2-3
Snowdrops (Galanthus nivalis & cvs.)	15	2
Tulips (Tulipa cvs.)	14-20	2-3

1. **Potting Bulbs:** A container should be deep enough to hold a minimum 2-inch layer of potting soil topped with bulbs whose pointed ends just reach the rim. Make sure your pot has good drainage. For the best impact, pack the top layer with bulbs no more than 1/2" apart. Add soil loosely to fill. Water well, and label with plant names, date they enter cold storage, and the date they should leave it.

2. **Cold /Dark Storage:** In the cold, bulbs make roots. Bulbs can be kept outdoors in a cold frame, in a refrigerator, or in a cool garage at 40 - 48 degrees. If using a cold frame where temps drop below 30 degrees, protect bulbs by mulching them with leaves or hay. If placing them in the refrigerator, remove fruits and vegetables, which give off ethylene gas - bad for bulbs. Cover bulbs stored in the garage or refrigerator with a brown paper bag.

3. **Warm Up:** When new pale growth appears, it is time to bring the pots out of storage and green them up. For the first week or two, keep them in bright but indirect light at around 60 degrees, in a place where you can make sure the soil stays evenly moist as the plants develop. Once they are 4 or 5 inches tall, put them in a sunnier, warmer spot (ideally, 68 degrees), and wait for flowers to emerge and start coloring. At that point, position them in less-direct light to prolong bloom. Water twice a week to encourage active growth. Whenever you water, turn them a quarter of a turn and this will keep them from growing toward the light.

Note that hardy forced bulbs may be planted in the yard in the fall. They may not bloom the next year.

4. Fragrant Ideas:

Paperwhites - These are the easiest to force because they do not have a chilling requirement (they are considered a non-hardy bulb). Place on a bed of pebbles, glass, etc. and add water to base of bulb. If you want to delay growth, place in refrigerator and take out at 3 week intervals. To slow the rampant growth, move to a cool room at night and add a tablespoon of vodka to the water once the stalks are 5 inches tall.

Hyacinths - Pre-chill the bulbs in the refrigerator in a brown paper bag for 15 weeks. Mark your calendar! Place in a Hyacinth glass adding water to the base of the bulb. Do not let roots dry out. It will take approximately 3 weeks to come to full bloom.

Tulips - Plant with flat side towards the pot edge. In this way the leaf will hang over edge of the pot creating a better composition.

5. **No forcing here - just a note for outdoor containers:** Mix bulbs in with perennials, annuals and small shrubs. Layer the bulbs in containers for a succession of blooms. Just remember that the larger the bulb, the deeper you need to go. *The rule of thumb is to plant bulbs and tubers twice as deep as they are high.*

Once your bulbs have finished blooming, trim the greens. If you have them in with a mixed container, you might try leaving them to bloom again the next year. Depending on the bulb variety, you may have new bulbs ("naturalizing"). If you have planted a layered container, after blooms have died back you can dig up all the bulbs and let them dry out. Plant them the next fall in the yard or containers.



Grape hyacinth
2 inches deep,
split bulbs in
two clumps

Crocus
2 inches deep,
sweep of bulbs



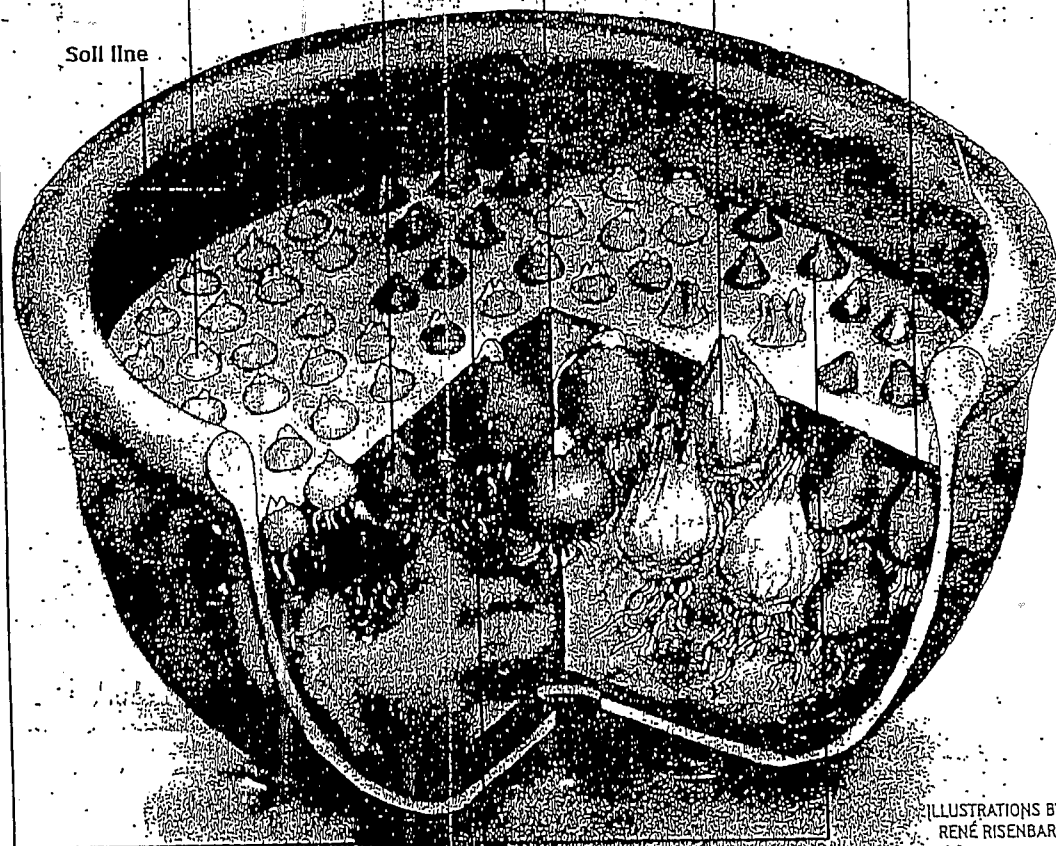
Dutch Iris
2 layers,
bottom layer
2 inches deep,
clump in middle

Hyacinth
2 layers,
bottom layer
4 inches deep



Daffodil
2 layers,
bottom layer
4 inches deep

Tulip
2 layers,
bottom layer
4 inches deep



ILLUSTRATIONS BY
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Forced bulbs become winter bouquet

Now's the time to pot up bulbs for forcing blooms early in the new year. It's easy. Our plan gives you a succession of bulbs for up to six weeks, with crocuses starting the show and tulips closing it.

◆ Partially fill a 12-inch-wide, about 8-inch-deep pot with lightweight potting mix. Make sure the pot has a hole in the bottom for drainage; bulbs rot in wet soil.

◆ The bulbs: six daffodils, five tulips, five to six hyacinths, 14 grape hyacinths, 10 Dutch iris, 30 crocus.

◆ Tuck taller, later bloomers in the back. Plant bigger bulbs deeper than smaller ones. Tops of the bulbs should be below the rim of the pot. Plant snugly but make sure bulbs don't touch. Cover with soil, then water well. Add more potting soil if needed.

◆ Place pot in a dark, cool (but not freezing) place for bulbs to root, such as the garage, a crawl space or even the fridge. Check periodically, and add water if soil dries out.

◆ After about 12 weeks, shoots should be emerging. Move pot to a warmer area (about 55 to 60 degrees is good) with brighter light. Once buds appear, move pot into your house, but away from heating vents to make flowers last longer. As flowers fade, pinch off flowering stems.

◆ You can replant the bulbs in your garden, but don't expect a bloom until the second year. ◆