

Instructions for Forcing Spring-Flowering Bulbs

Most Spring Blooming Bulbs can be forced by following a few small steps. Just remember that horticulture is not an 'exact science', and that temperature, humidity, light and even refrigerators can sometimes be different, giving different results. Fortunately, plants can be forgiving of imperfect humans! Just relax, experiment and enjoy!

1. Using pots with drain holes in the bottom, place the bulbs in a pot $\frac{3}{4}$ filled with soil; cover necks of bulbs with 1" of soil or gravel. (Potting soil should be a coarse growing mix and can be obtained at your local garden center)
2. Water pots and allow them to drain
3. Place in a cool area (approx 50-60°F for 1 to 2 weeks until fully rooted; then reduce temperature to 35-45°F for 12-16 weeks. There are a variety of ways and means to achieve this cool period.
 - a. In a refrigerator; an old-fashioned one is best, however if frost-free, place pot in it in the hydrator. Take out any ripening vegetables or fruit, as these will produce ethylene gas, which may cause bulbs to abort their blooms - or better still, use the 'beer fridge' in the garage!
 - b. In a Styrofoam cooler in an unheated garage. The cooler keeps the bulbs at a relatively constant cool temperature - or in a garbage bag or box surrounded with Styrofoam peanuts
 - c. Buried outside under a high pile of leaves/mulch (at least 6"-10" deep), preferably on the north side of a building in the shade.
4. Check on the inside pots every other week. If soil appears very dry, you may want to water *lightly*. When sprouts begin forming on top, they should be about ready to be brought into the forcing environment.
5. If you are forcing bulbs for fun, just put the pots in a sunny location where you can enjoy them while they bloom! This should take anywhere from two to four weeks. Water only as needed, making sure not to drown them!
6. For those who need blooms on a specific date, there is a little more work to do. To control the rate of growth, you must take into account:
 - a. LIGHT - during fall, winter and early spring, there is less light than what the bulbs want. You should supply additional cool light in the form of fluorescent or 'grow lights' very close (within one foot) of the merging foliage. This will prevent the plant from getting too tall and eliminate the need for staking.
 - b. BOTTOM HEAT - The bulbs will grow faster if bottom heat is applied. Ideally, potted bulbs should be placed on heating mats (available from greenhouse suppliers). If not available, a food warmer, refrigerator top or freezer top can be used, just as long as some heat is produced. A cool environment 50-60° is the ideal room temperature.
7. If foliage and blooms appear to be maturing too quickly, take them away from the bottom heat, to a cooler environment but keep the light plentiful.
8. When they have finished blooming, continue to water as a houseplant. When spring arrives and there is no longer danger of hard freeze (below 25°), they can be planted outside, bulbs, roots and all, in the garden!

OR

If you've bought bulbs that have already been pre-cooled dry (without the pot and soil), pot them just as soon as you receive them because the pre-cooling effect will lessen each day they are out of the cooler. Once potted, water well and let drain. Then put them in a dark 50-60° area for a couple of weeks to encourage the roots to develop. Once rooted, you may bring them out to a sunny location, following the suggestions above. Good luck!