



HEALTHY GARDEN TIPS

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Telephone: 707-253-4221

University of California Cooperative Extension – Napa County

FORCING BULBS TO BLOOM EARLY

By Dean Donaldson, Farm Advisor

The process takes about 10 weeks. Start in early October for blooms at New Year's.

Step 1 Select large, healthy bulbs and soak them in water for 24 hours. Adding a rooting hormone, like Rootone, will help promote active rooting.

Step 2 Plant in moist potting soil. Six-inch size pots can hold 6 tulips or 3 hyacinths or 3 daffodils or 15 crocuses. Set bulbs so necks are even with the top of the soil. Tulip bulbs are placed with the flat side facing the outer edge of the pot. Allow a half inch of space between the lip of the pot and the top of the soil for watering. Water twice to settle the soil around the bulbs. No fertilizer is needed, since it should already be in the potting mix.

Step 3 Watered pots should be stored in the cold (35-48°F) for a minimum of 10 weeks. This will “break dormancy” and allow time for good root growth before they are moved indoors. Consider putting them in an unheated garage or shed. Be sure pots do not dry out while in cold storage. They do not need sunlight while they are growing roots in the cold area.

Step 4 When you start to see green leaves growing, begin to bring the pots indoors. Bring in a few each week so you will have flowers for a longer time. Put the pots in a cool room (50-70°F) with lots of good light. The cooler the room, the longer the flowers will last. Water the pots regularly for good flower development.

Step 5 After the flowers fade, move the pots outside and give the bulbs a ‘rest.’ The leaves should gradually turn yellow and dry. These bulbs will be too weak to force the following year, but can be planted in the yard for future flowers.

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Additional Reading:

Ortho Books: *House Plants Indoors/Outdoors*

Lane Publishing: *Sunset Western Garden Book*

American Horticultural Society: *Daffodil Handbook*, also American Horticultural Magazine, Vol. 42 No. 2

BULBS IN POTS

By H.M. Butterfield, Extension Specialist Emeritus

Many kinds of bulbs are easy to grow in pots and force into early indoor bloom. The tulip, hyacinth, narcissus, crocus, anemone, yellow calla, tuberous begonia, are among the bulbs most commonly used, although there are many others that can be grown in pots successfully. The hyacinth, tuberous begonia, freesia, and narcissus are most easily grown. Daffodils do fairly well, especially where the pots are large. Tulips do well if the moisture and temperature are properly regulated, but the blooms may be ruined by high temperatures.

The growing of cyclamens, gloxinias, and certain similar bulbs is largely limited to greenhouse conditions. Cyclamen culture is difficult for the beginner, since the cyclamen mite and other troubles must be controlled. Growing lilies in pots is a special undertaking, and cannot be recommended for the beginner. Most of the lilies sold at Easter have been forced and carried along in a greenhouse. As the novice gains experience, he may wish to try some of the more difficult bulbs if the proper cultural conditions can be provided.

Five or six-inch pots give better results than very small pots for most bulbs. The bulbs usually should not be planted deeper than one inch below the surface, and may be planted much closer together than is customary in open beds. The common practice is to plant 1 or 2 bulbs in a five-inch pot, 3 bulbs in a six-inch pot, and 5 bulbs in an eight-inch pot.

The potting mixture should generally be a light one, containing loam, leaf mold, sand, and occasionally charcoal. Use a commercially available potting soil or raised bed mix. Be sure it drains well before planting. Do not over fertilize. Give a light fertilizer after bulbs begin growing. A home prepared mix of 1/3 sphagnum peat, 1/3 perlite and 1/3 sandy soil works well.

The planted pots should be set in a cool, dark place until the bulbs begin to root. They can then be brought into the light. It usually takes 8 to 10 weeks for the roots to become established. Optimum temperatures range from 50-60°F.

Regular attention should be given to the potted bulbs. Bulbs planted in a light mixture should be watered carefully to prevent drying out. It is possible to place one pot inside another, filling the space between with compost, peat moss, or sand to reduce evaporation. The planted pots are sometimes buried in the outside garden or in a bed of sand. If the pots are exposed to drying air outside, the bulbs may fail to develop and bloom. The control of soil moisture is less difficult under greenhouse conditions.

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