



A Gift That Keeps on Giving

By Joy Gridley

UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County

It may seem early to think about holiday gifts, but here is a suggestion that could put a smile on a friend or loved one's face for very little expense and time involved. And of course there is always that coworker that you barely know but find it necessary to give a "little something" at the office gift exchange. This one is always a hit. I'm talking about a pot of flowers that would brighten the indoor winter months, and if you choose, even smell wonderful in the bargain.

Your first stop (Do it soon so there is a good selection.), will be at a plant nursery to pick out some spring blooming bulbs, some potting soil, and a pot the right size for the bulbs you chose. Not all bulbs are appropriate for forcing. Some bulbs, such as tulips, grow too tall and fall over. Successful bulbs for forcing are those in the Narcissus or the Hyacinthus genus. These are the good old fashioned daffodils and hyacinths. Both come in many varieties and colors. If you want a scented bulb in your gift, any hyacinth will be intoxicating. For a scented narcissus choose *Narcissus jonquilla*, a small but wonderfully scented daffodil or *Narcissus tazetta paper white*. Often the bulbs come already packaged in multiples with a photo of the flower and directions for planting. Choose bulbs that look round and healthy and without cuts or bruises. A package of five or six is enough for one pot. Pick a bag of soil that is intended for indoor plants to avoid any pest issues. Read the label on your bulb package to find out how deep to plant your bulbs. The usual rule of thumb is to plant the bulb to the depth of three times its diameter. For example, a hyacinth bulb two inches across would be planted six inches deep. Choose your pot with that in mind along with how many bulbs you want to plant. An odd number always is more eye appealing.

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The next step is where time is involved. The bulbs should be winterized, i.e., tricked into thinking it's a cold winter. Place them in a paper bag in the vegetable drawer of your refrigerator for six to eight weeks. Be careful they don't freeze. This tricks the bulbs into thinking that it is spring when you take them out to plant, which should be mid-November. Place the bulbs in your pot at the proper depth without them touching, cover with soil to the top of the pot, water thoroughly, and place in a sunny spot. Allow the soil to dry out slightly before watering again. By the winter holidays you should have the leaves almost or slightly peeking out, so your recipient can see the promise of what is to come.

As far as a presentation is concerned, all you need is some colorful cellophane wrap so the pot doesn't take a tumble, and a card that shows a photo of the flowers to come (keep the card top that comes with the bulbs), and your holiday wishes. You'll be amazed at how your recipient will think you have performed some magic trick, and you will be given a narrative and photos during the next month as to how the plants are progressing!

On Saturday, October 12, Master Gardeners will be in the Sherwood Demonstration Garden at 9:00 a.m. for open garden day and a planting demonstration in the vegetable garden. October is beautiful in the garden, so bring your friends and enjoy a stroll and some hands-on information-sharing.

Save the date for "Fall into Gardening," October 19. 9:00 am to 2:00 pm. Join us for many presentations, stay a half-hour or all day! Learn how putting your garden to bed now can pay big dividends next year; cool season planting, mulch and composting, and tool care are also covered. All 16 gardens are staffed and select fall plants are available for purchase (cash/check only). Refreshments and children's activities, too!

For more information on the UCCE Master Gardeners of El Dorado County, see our website at <http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu>. Master Gardeners are available to answer home gardening questions Tuesday through Friday, 9:00 a.m. to noon, by calling [\(530\) 621-5512](tel:5306215512), or send us an email using the Ask a Master Gardener option on our website. Walk-ins are welcome at our office, located at 311 Fair Lane in Placerville. We also encourage you to visit us at the Sherwood Demonstration Garden, located at 6699 Campus Drive in Placerville, behind Folsom Lake College, El Dorado Center. See http://mgeldorado.ucanr.edu/Demonstration_Garden for more information and days and hours of operation, or call us to schedule a tour. To sign up for notices and newsletters, see http://ucanr.edu/master_gardener_e-news. Master Gardeners are also on Facebook and Instagram; we hope you enjoy our postings and will share them with your friends.