

Planting Bulbs after Christmas

Lemoine Waite, Master Gardener, January 1, 2023

Q: I was gifted a Paperwhite for Christmas. Can I plant it out in my landscape now that it is no longer blooming?

A: Paperwhites, *Narcissus papyraceus*, are a popular bulb for the holidays as they can be grown in water and bloom in doors. They have white flowers that perfume the room with a sweet smell. After blooms fade, cut back flower stock and leave in a spot with bright light for 6 to 8 weeks. Bulbs replenish their energy after bloom with photosynthesis so the longer you can leave the green leaves after bloom the stronger the bulb will be the next bloom season.

To plant out into the landscape choose a spot that will not be dug up and planted later in the year. Dig a hole deep enough to cover the top of the bulb by a couple of inches. Mix a spoon full of bulb fertilizer or bone meal with the soil in the bottom of the hole and then place roots into the loose soil so that they are spread out. You want to avoid "J rooting" the roots, this is where the roots are bent back onto themselves in a "J" shape. Fill the hole and water. Once planted do not overwater, the bulbs only need to be watered when the soil becomes dry. Let foliage yellow and dry up naturally. For any potted bulb that you plant out into the landscape make sure to inspect the bulb, roots and foliage to make sure it is not suffering from a virus or nematodes as you do not want these in your landscape.

If the paperwhite was grown in water it may take a couple of years before it blooms again. Bulbs grown in soil will bloom next season in the landscape but due to colder soil temperatures the bulb will most likely bloom in February. For paperwhite bulbs grown in a pot with soil you can leave the bulb in the pot and it will bloom again next year. If you plan to leave in the pot, fertilize now with a bulb fertilizer and leave in a brightly lit area for 6 to 7 weeks. Once the foliage starts to turn yellow, place the pot on its side and put it into a dark area where it will not freeze. Let the pot dry out and leave in the dark place until 4 to 6 weeks before you want them to bloom. To get bulb to bloom, move it to a warm brightly lit spot and water.

Another bulb that is popular around Christmas time is an Amaryllis, *Amaryllis belladonna*. Follow the same procedures described for the paperwhites if planting out into the landscape. Outdoors they will bloom later in the season usually in March or April depending on soil temperatures. Make sure to plant in a well-drained area as they will rot if soil is too wet. Most people treat them as a house plant and leave them in the pot. If the Amaryllis was a waxed bulb, you need to remove the wax from around the bulb and plant into a pot with a well-draining potting soil. To grow as a house plant, cut back flower stalk after bloom and fertilize. Leave plant in a brightly lit spot, water only when soil is dry. If grown in a brightly lit area all year it should bloom next season or more often.