

Forcing Paperwhite bulbs

Plant bulbs 4-6 weeks before you want them to bloom.

- A glass jar, vase or bowl without any drainage
- Rocks, marbles or sea glass
- Paperwhite narcissus bulbs

We like to grow paperwhite narcissus in a tall jar or vase. We think it looks pretty and that way we don't have to worry about the weight of the flowers tipping the bulbs over. You can often find inexpensive vases in craft or thrift stores.

We like using smooth stones, which you can buy in a nursery or craft store, but you can use anything that isn't absorbent for this project.

Fill the bottom of your glass jar, vase or bowl with about two to four inches of stones, marbles or sea glass. The purpose of this is to give your bulbs stability and to keep the bulbs above the water while allowing the roots to stay wet. If the bulbs sit in water, they tend to rot.

Place your bulbs close together on top of the stones. Nestle them into the stones until they are stable. It's very important to make sure all the bulbs are sitting at the same level, so that the roots, not the bulbs, will be sitting in water.

Add just enough water, so the level is below the paperwhite narcissus bulbs but is wetting the roots, which at this point are usually just dry strings. This is very important because if you leave the bulbs sitting in water, they will rot.

For optimal growing, keep your bulbs in a cool (50-60°F) spot, out of direct sunlight, for a couple of weeks until the roots have grown. At this point, they will be white.

After this rooting period, you must put them in a bright, warm spot. Some people recommend putting them under "grow lights," or fluorescent lights. Or, if you want to speed up the flowering, you can also use a heat mat or heating pad underneath your bulbs.

That said, we usually plant my bulbs and put them on the kitchen counter, which is bright but gets no direct sun. With regular watering, but without any extra attention, they do fine.

Paperwhites tend to fall over after they flower. This is more of a problem if they are in a shorter container. To prop them up, we used some chopsticks or bamboo stakes stuck down the sides of the vase or bowl and encircled with twine or decorative ribbon.