



# Cornell University Cooperative Extension



gardening.cornell.edu

## Forcing Bulbs for Indoor Bloom

### Overview



- A fun, easy activity to do with children and youth.
- Appropriate for audiences with special needs, this activity requires minimal manual dexterity, and can be easily completed by people who use one hand.
- A great winter activity!

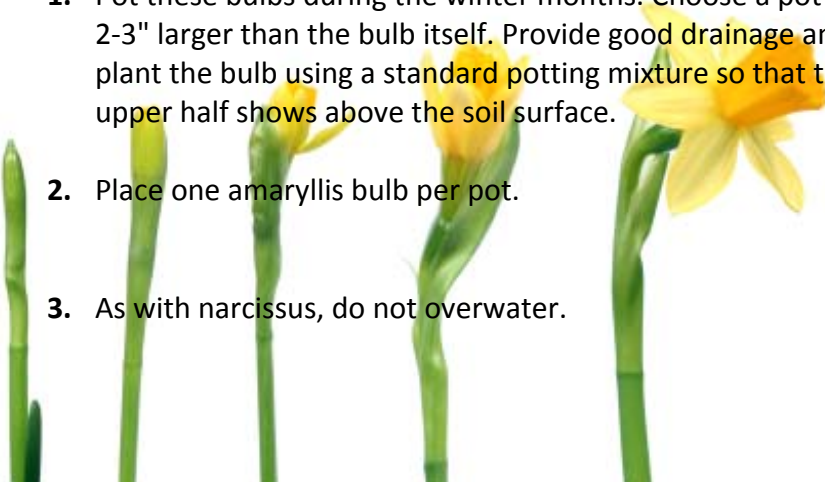
### Step by step

#### Narcissus:

1. Place gravel, pebbles or sand in bowls or low pots. Three bulbs per participant is an ideal number, though one would also work.
2. Nestle bulbs upright into a single container, so that the base or root area is tucked in, but the “shoulders” are clearly well above the gravel.
3. Add just enough water to come up to the base of the bulbs. Place in a well-lit, 60-65° F location. Temperatures of 75° or more encourage weak growth and flowers do not last long. Do not overwater.

#### Amaryllis:

1. Pot these bulbs during the winter months. Choose a pot that is 2-3" larger than the bulb itself. Provide good drainage and plant the bulb using a standard potting mixture so that the upper half shows above the soil surface.
2. Place one amaryllis bulb per pot.
3. As with narcissus, do not overwater.



## What does "forcing" mean anyway?

By meeting certain conditions, you can get bulbs to flower indoors, long before spring has arrived outdoors. Many types of bulbs can be forced into bloom, but two are especially easy: amaryllis and paper white narcissus. These don't require cold storage treatment.

## Materials

- bulbs (select large, plump bulbs that are free of mold or rot)
- pots
- planting medium - sand, gravel, pebbles for paper whites, soil for amaryllis

## Keeping costs down

- Check to see if a local florist would be willing to donate bulbs, or provide them at a discount.
- Send a notice to families of participants, inviting them to “sponsor” this activity, which could be part of a theme day “Spring out of winter!” day.
- Gardeners in the community often have boxes of leftover pots that they would be glad to donate.
- Check with your local Cooperative Extension office to see whether they, or their Master Gardener Volunteers, may have materials to spare.
- Look for gravel or pebbles outdoors instead of purchasing. Wash before using.

## *“Which bulbs should we force?”*

### **Paper white narcissus**

- Lasts for one blooming period
- has numerous beautiful white flowers
- Is intensely fragrant. While this scent can be enjoyable, some find it overwhelming, particularly in small or stuffy spaces!

vs.

### **Amaryllis**

- relatively short blooming period
- dramatic floral display
- easy to grow
- can be kept to re-flower for years.

*The choice is yours!*



### **Go one step further...**

Try forcing more challenging bulbs, such as crocus, hyacinth or daffodils.

For more information about going further, please visit:  
<http://www.thebulbproject.org/wiki/index.php?title=Activities:Paperwhites>