



## Create an Indoor Garden this Winter

For a breath of spring in the depths of winter, it's hard to beat a pot of flowering paper-white narcissus. Paper-white narcissus are easy and foolproof enough that forcing them to flower is a good project even for the newest gardener and they make a beautiful decoration for your home or as a gift.

Purchase the bulbs anytime after October 1<sup>st</sup> from a reputable nursery or garden center. With paper-whites it is a good idea not to set them out all at once. Space out the time between when you set them out to every 10 days and then your blooms will not come all at once, then you will have blooms from December to Spring. Once you do set out the paper-white bulbs you should begin to see flowers in 4-6 weeks.

Although the term "forcing" is used when speaking of Paper-whites in our area of the Southeast it might be better expressed as "fooling" since what you really do is fool the bulb into thinking winter is over and it is time to bloom. Paper-whites are the easiest indoor bulbs to force or "fool", and are usually available at local nurseries and home improvement centers, or through catalogs.

Paperwhites are best grown in a shallow pot or bowl with no drainage holes in the bottom and best of all, no soil is required, only water. You will start by finding a container and filling the bottom with gravel, small stones, or even fun things like colored beads or marbles (there are tons of creative options). Then place as many paper-white bulbs as will fit on top of the gravel, with the pointed side up. Place the bulbs down in the gravel or marbles so that they act as support to hold the bulbs in place, but do not bury the bulbs. You want at least half of the bulb exposed. Add water up to the base of the bulbs and maintain it at this level making sure that the bulb does not stay in the water once it begins to send out roots or the bulb will rot. Place the container in a cool, dark place for two weeks before placing it in a warm, sunny location. Add water as evaporation and root uptake deplete the supply. Avoid disturbing the bulbs after planting as the roots are fragile.

There may be a slight difference in flower timing depending on the temperatures. Higher temperatures encourage weak growth and poor flowering. Bulbs immediately placed at a temperature of 60-70°F will bloom in about 6 weeks. For later bloom you can delay setting them out or the pot can be maintained at 50°F, and then moved to the higher temperature. For late spring bloom, the bulbs can be stored dry at 50°F. When potted, these will usually bloom in 3-4 weeks. The cooler the room, the longer it will take the bulbs to flower and the longer they will remain in bloom.

Paper-white narcissus are tender bulbs that will not overwinter outdoors easily and they may be forced only once. After the foliage begins to turn yellow, discard the bulbs and the potting medium (Gravel or marbles may be washed and stored and used again next year). Wash containers immediately and thoroughly to remove salts and lime deposits and hopefully by now, warmer temperatures and outdoor spring flowers have arrived!