

Bright Bulbs, Big Bang Bulb "Fooling" For Beginners

www.knollwoodgardens.com 937-426-0861



Fooling bulbs into thinking they've been through winter, when they have really spent time in your refrigerator, or a cold frame, allows you to enjoy in winter, when you most need a burst of color, a burst of glorious blooms.

You need a few basic things to get started in fooling your bulbs. First you'll need some clean, well-scrubbed pots with drainage holes and a good, well-draining potting soil. Then, of course, you'll need bulbs suitable for forcing. And then you will need a "chilling chamber" - some place where you can put the potted up bulbs that can be maintain at about 35-40 degrees F.

The easiest place for this is the refrigerator. If you do use the refrigerator, keep your bulbs away from apples, which release a gas that will inhibit the growth of your plants.

A cold frame works as well, or, if you lack that, a big box. If you go the big box method, you will also need leaves to stuff into the spaces around the pots to act as insulation - that way you can leave the box outside until it's time to bring the bulbs into bloom. Keep the box in an unheated garage in zones 5 and lower; in higher zones a well-insulated box should be all right outdoors.

To plant the bulbs, first put a nice base of potting soil in your pot. This soil base should be high enough that the bulbs' noses come within about 2" of the rim of the pot. Place as many bulbs as will fit into the pot, then cover with soil to about 3/4" of the rim. Firm the soil down. Now take the pot to the sink, or some other container holding a few inches of water. Let the pot sit there until it has absorbed water all the way to the top of the soil. Let it drain for 24 hours, and then place the pot into your chilling chamber.

The actual length of the chilling period depends on the type of bulbs you have planted. You will be able to tell when they are ready to come into slightly warmer temperatures, though, as you will see shoots coming up at the top of the pot, and if you turn the pot over you will see roots emerging.

Remember - we are fooling these bulbs, so it won't do to take them straight from their chilly resting-place into a hot room. They need to think that it's spring - which means they will do best in a place with temperatures of around 50-55 degrees F. Even if the rest of your house is relatively warm, you may be able to find cooler temperatures close to a bright windowsill.

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If you haven't got an ideally cool place which will allow you to admire your blooming bulbs, then enjoy them during the day and move them to a colder place at night. Small bulbs like crocus can even be stored in the refrigerator at night and removed to enjoy in the morning.

Bring the bulbs first into an area with relatively dim light for the first few days, until the shoots "green up." Then you can move them to an area with good, bright light. But once again - it must be a cool place, for temperatures that are too warm will produce weak, floppy plants.

It is best to plant bulbs of a single kind in each pot, because they will have identical chilling and light requirements. However, it is possible to layer bulbs in a large pot for a longer show. In that case, put the larger bulbs (tulips and daffodils) on the bottom layer, add some soil, and then layer minor bulbs such as crocus and scilla on top of the larger bulbs.

Bulbs that take approximately the same chilling time include early to [mid-season tulips](#) , [spring crocus](#), [hyacinth](#) and [early to mid-season daffodils](#).

Tips for Forcing Flowerbulbs

- * Buy top-quality bulbs from a reputable source.
- * If you plan to make arrangements with the budded bulbs, force them in small pots. The pots must have holes for drainage.
- * Plant in sterile, well-drained potting soil.
- * Planting depth need not be precise; just below the soil's surface is fine.
- * After planting, store bulbs in a cool, dark place. Do not let the bulbs freeze, and do not let them dry out.
- * For strong flowers, a chilling period of consistent, cold temperatures is essential (see "Flowerbulb Forcing Timetable").
- * After they bloom, put bulbs back in pots and cover loosely with soil until they can be planted in the garden. They should come back strong their second spring in the ground.

Common name (Latin name)	Chilling period in weeks	Weeks after chilling until blooms open
Glory-of-the-snow	15	2-3
Snow crocus	15	2-3
Dutch crocus	15	2
Winter aconite	15	2
Checkered fritillary	15	3
Snowdrop (<i>Galanthus nivalis</i>)	15	2
Hyacinth	11-14	2-3
Reticulata iris	15	2-3
Grape hyacinth	13-15	2-3
(<i>Muscari armeniacum</i>)	14-15	2-3
Daffodil (<i>Narcissus</i>)	15-17	2-3
Tulip	14-20	2-3