

Forcing Bulbs into Flower

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We have an exciting Standard Flower Show, “From Small Seeds, Great Things Grow” coming up soon on March 22, 2022. It is an NGC Standard Flower Show presented by the Judges Council of The Federated Garden Clubs of Maryland, Inc. in conjunction with the FGCMMD annual meeting. This show features house plants, container plantings and a forced bulb section. Forcing bulbs into bloom is a wonderful winter gardening project. Help us fill classes for our flower show!



It has been two years since most of us has participated in a Standard Flower Show. Time to dust off our Flower Show Handbook and attempt forcing flower bulbs into flower! Anyone can force bulbs into bloom. Be sure to have the two main books for National Garden Clubs Standard Flower Shows handy; *The Handbook for Flower Shows*, Rev 2017 plus all corrections and additions found on the NGC Flower Show section and the second important book, its supplement, *Horticulture Exhibiting and Judging*. BOTH are available for purchase at National Garden Club website: www.gardenclub.org.

The Flower Show Schedule provides all rules and information for the particular Standard Flower Show. To get you copy of this schedule go to www.fgcofmd.org Before going out to purchase plants that you might want to enter, please consider the following Horticulture rules for this Standard Flower Show; You need to own and have grown your houseplants for at least 90 days. *Note that as of 12/23/21, you should have acquired your houseplants for the FGCMMD State Flower Show. You'll have to use the houseplants you already own. For combination plantings such as planters, dish gardens and terrariums, you only need to have planted your combination plantings together just 6 weeks before the March 22, 2022, show or by February 8, 2022. When forcing bulbs, there is no minimum time ownership requirement!

Section C: “Sow Joy” Forced Bulbs feature *Hippeastrum*, *Narcissus* and *Tulipa* Bulbs.

Forced Bulbs are often featured during winter or early spring flower shows and provides a challenge for winter gardening. *Hippeastrum* (Amaryllis) and Paperwhite varieties of *Narcissus* are the easiest bulbs to force as they do NOT require a chilling period to flower. Typical varieties usually take 4-6 weeks to flower after planting when placed in a warm and brightly lit part of your home. The *Papillo* and *Cybister* Amaryllis cultivars can take 6-12 weeks to bloom flowering stalks.

Non-paperwhite cultivars of *Narcissus* and *Tulipa* (Tulips) are a bit tougher to force into bloom. Both of these bulb types require a chilling period in order for the bulbs to flower. It takes 12-16 weeks @ 34-42 degrees Fahrenheit. Thus, unless you already had *Tulipa* and *Narcissus* bulbs planted and chilling, you won't be able to force these into successful blooms in time for the March 22, 2022, Standard Flower Show which is less than 90 days away.

If you ordered these bulbs today, received them in a week, planted and began chilling for 12 weeks and then grew to flowering stage for another 4 weeks, the blooms would appear far too late for the flower show.

Since we are out of time to pre-chill *Tulipa* and *Narcissus* bulbs, we have a trick available to us: Purchase “pre-chilled” bulbs. Yes, you can actually go online to purchase bulbs that have been pre-chilled for you!

There is only one website that still has stocks of pre-chilled bulbs for sale, Tulip World. www.tulipworld.com has pre-chilled bulbs for winter forcing! They have recently slashed their pricing and they currently have many different *Tulipa* and *Narcissus* bulb cultivars available at reasonable prices. I warn you to order these bulbs ASAP as stocks are running low. **ORDER NOW.** Just be sure to search and purchase only “pre-chilled” bulbs. You will need to plant the bulbs immediately into a container with drainage holes and a good soil-less plant mix. Some ballast of clean rocks on the bottom is always a clever idea to ensure that you tall flowering bulbs don’t flop over. Heavier clay pots are also good ballast for taller plants. Water your planted bulbs and then place in a cool place (around 40-50 degrees) for 4-6 weeks to encourage root growth. Once the tops of plants begin to grow, you can pull the potted bulbs inside. Be sure to use a container that measures less than 7” in internal diameter.

Tulip World also has many *Hippeastrum* (Amaryllis) cultivars available in a variety of colors and sizes priced around \$15-\$19 each. Amaryllis bulbs do NOT require chilling in order to bloom. Follow online information on how to plant and grow these beauties. Most will grow after planting to bloom in 4-6 weeks. Some of the cybister Amaryllis rare varieties may take 10-12 weeks to bloom. Thus, order bulbs NOW and plant them accordingly for a March 22, 2022, show date.

www.Bloomingbulb.com This site offers two cultivars of Paperwhite Narcissus which do not require a chilling period. *Narcissus* ‘Chinese Sacred Lily’ - 10 bulbs for \$10.85 AND *Narcissus* ‘Ziva’ - 10 bulbs for \$9.51. As of this writing, this site also offers *Hippeastrum* (Amaryllis) bulbs from \$7.11 - \$25.61 in many heights, colors, and cultivars. Take advantage of free shipping and other cost reduction options. Order enough to share with a garden friend!

www.Brecksgifts.com This site offers several bare bulbs and some planted containers of Amaryllis costing from \$14.99-\$34.99 per bulb with some offerings of rare Papillo cultivars. Unfortunately, their paperwhite bulbs are out of stock. Most of my favorite, dependable bulb vendors have been out of paperwhite and amaryllis bulbs for months. My personal suggestion is that you purchase your bulbs from only dependable bulb growers/vendors and do so IMMEDIATELY as stocks are running low and the prices are good.



Special Growing tips for forcing Pre-chilled *Narcissus* and *Tulipa* bulbs:

- Smart option: Purchase *Tulipa* bulbs that are naturally shorter in height which makes it much easier to transport to a flower show!
- Plant bulbs such that pointy ends upwards. You can plant the bulbs close together but they should not be touching. Some growers suggest two layers of bulbs for a full display while ensuring that the tips of the bottom bulbs are in-between the top layer of bulbs with a good inch or more of soil between layers. Plant as many bulbs as you can inside the container for a good display of leaves and blooms. Always use some rocks on bottom of clay container with drainage holes and just showing above soil level. Water in well.
- Place planted bulbs in cool location such as a garage or basement where it is 40-55 degrees for 4-6 weeks. This encourages strong root growth.
- Taller flowering plants can be staked but it should be unobtrusive. You can use green stakes or stakes painted green and use green string to wrap around the stakes to support the leaves and keep your plants upright without flopping. It's best to do this before flower blooms appear.
- Place potted Tulips into your home when the tops begin to grow and put in a brightly lit space, outside of direct sunlight inside your house. Rotate pots a quarter turn daily to create well-formed foliage growth. Water when the soil is dry. Never let the pot sit in water as it could rot your bulbs.
- Blooming too fast? A tip to keep your Tulips from blooming before the show date is to place the pot in a cool area (garage/basement) and cover it with a large box. It is best if you do this while the blooms have not yet opened. You can hold them like this up to 2-3 days before the show date. Just remove the box and move your Tulips to a bright sunny lit room to green up the few days before the show.
- Blooming too late? Just ENJOY your blooms and let them brighten your mood.
- Transport by placing in box, lined with towels in vehicle. Avoid quick stops!

Special Tips for Growing *Hippeastrum* (Amaryllis)

- Smart option: Purchase Amaryllis that is naturally shorter in height, including miniatures which makes transport much easier. Also, Jumbo bulbs typically can offer 2-3 flowering stalks per bulb. Smaller bulbs typically offer 1-2 flowering stalks.
- Hold Amaryllis bulbs, prior to planting, in stasis, inside a paper sack in a fridge without vegetables or fruit which emit methane gas and can kill bulbs. If a fridge is not available, store in a cold place such as garage or basement where the temperatures are above freezing.
- 4-5 weeks before Flower Show date: For typical amaryllis, plant the single Amaryllis bulb with one-third of the pointy bulb tip above soil level, pointing upwards, into a clay pot with clean rocks on bottom for ballast. This will help keep your tall flowering blooms from flopping over during transport.
- For exotic Cybister/Papillo Amaryllis cultivars: Plant the single bulb 8-12 weeks before show date or as directed by vendor.

- Water in well. Place in brightly lit warm room, rotating pot 45 degrees daily. Water when soil is dry and do not let container sit in water drainage. (It can rot your bulb)
- A super tip I learned from a Amaryllis Exhibitor to get multiple bloom stalks to grow at the same time is to place the potted Amaryllis bulb into a box with a seed growing heat mat below it, covered with a towel. A potted Amaryllis with multiple bloom stalks at once creates a gorgeous display! *Note: Works best with Jumbo sized bulbs which typically offer 2-3 flowering stalks. Larger/Mature “jumbo” bulbs typically offer more flowering stalks.
- Blooming too fast? A tip to keep your Amaryllis from blooming too early is to place the pot in a cool area (garage/basement) above freezing and cover it with a large box. You can hold it like this up to 2-3 days before the show date. It is best to do this while the florets are still in bud stage. Just remove the box and move your Amaryllis to a bright sunny lit room to green up the foliage and open blooms.
- Blooming too late? Enjoy the blooms when they come. They will brighten your home.
- Transport by placing container into box, lined with towels into vehicle. Place it in the center floor of your vehicle and avoid sudden stops!

Go ahead and force some spring blooms during this winter. We’d love to see your successful blooms at our FGCMMD Annual Meeting Flower Show!

Sources:

Bulb Forcing for beginners and the seriously smitten. Art Wolk. AAB Bok Publishing LLC, Voorhees, New Jersey. *Note: This book is out of print. Try Libraries for this exceptional reference book.