

Forcing Bulbs Indoors  
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I was at a store last night, just killing time while I waited for my daughter to finish swimming practice, when I came upon some bags of bulbs. Not light bulbs, which I do need to buy, but tulip, crocus, daffodil, hyacinth and narcissus bulbs. As I looked through the choices, I was reminded of my first Christmas in Ringgold. It was October of 1993 when I moved to Ringgold to become a County Extension Agent. I had the privilege to work with three of the nicest ladies, Mrs. Jenilee Lemmon, Mrs. Lois Turnipseed and Mrs. Kay Eary. Well, back to the bulbs. I was shopping in a local five & dime and noticed an Amaryllis display. There were a variety of colors and I started deciding which ones I wanted. Well, I ended up purchasing four and took them back to the office, then called in the troops. "Ladies", I announced, "we are going to have a contest". Everyone chose a color and we all prepared our bulbs. Over the next few weeks we watched, watched, turned and watched, watched and turned. The old saying that a watched pot never boils also applies to the Amaryllis Bulbs. Soon the stalks began to grow and boy did they grow. Around Christmas it became apparent that we would have a winner, unfortunately it was not me. In fact, mine was the last to bloom. We all had a great time watching and waiting as our plant blossomed and it brought a little sunshine inside our office during the short days of winter. Bulbs may not have time to bloom before Christmas, but you and your family can enjoy watching as they grow in the coming weeks.

According to Drs. Paul Thomas and Gary Wade, Extension Horticulturists, you can force bulbs to bloom indoors earlier than they normally would outdoors. Crocus, galanthus, hyacinth, narcissus, daffodil, scilla and tulip are easier to force than most.

Pot the bulbs in October or November using a well drained soil. The number of bulbs per pot will vary according to pot and bulb size. Keep them in darkness at about 40 degrees F for eight to twelve weeks in a cold frame outdoors or in an unheated garage or basement, or in your refrigerator. (The bulbs must not be allowed to freeze.) Do not allow the soil in the pots to dry out.

After eight to 12 weeks, the root system should be extensively developed and the shoots emerging from the bulbs. Place the pots in a cool, bright room at about 55 degrees F. They will bloom in about one month. High temperatures and/or poor light will cause stretching and weak stems.

Crocus, hyacinth, narcissus, and tulip bulbs can be refrigerated at 40 degrees F for two months prior to planting, then potted and forced as above. The results are not usually as satisfactory since less time exists for the root system to develop.

Discard bulbs that have been forced. They seldom grow and flower well when replanted in the garden.