Create an early spring indoors

Source: Rick Durham, extension professor, Department of Horticulture

You may have gotten bulbs as gifts for Christmas or you might just be wishing for a little spring color and fragrance. Now is the perfect time to think about coaxing spring flowers to bloom in your home.

Forcing is a way of tricking bulbs into blooming out of season indoors. Not all spring-flowering bulbs are good for forcing and some, like tulips and most daffodils, require a significant cold period before they will emerge, so it may be too late in the season to start those. But there are several plants whose bulbs are easy to force inside at this time of year. Paperwhite narcissus, unlike other narcissus, don’t require a cold period prior to sprouting, so their delicate, fragrant flowers are often the first thing people think about. Amaryllis bulbs also can be forced to bloom without a preceding cold period.

If you want large blooms, choose the largest bulbs you can find and choose firm bulbs without soft spots.

Amaryllis and narcissus can be water-forced. Position them, tip-end up, about one-eighth to one-fourth inch above the level of the water. A forcing jar is good for this or any type of glass or vase that has a neck that will support the bulb above the water. Roots from the bulb will extend into the water as the bulb comes to life. Once the plants start to bloom, add water every two or three days to keep it at a level right below the bulb.

Both plants can also be planted in gravel or potting soil. If you choose those methods, make sure to leave the top half of the bulb exposed above the planting medium. When they start to bloom, keep the soil evenly moist, but not soggy.

If you use gravel, wedge the bulb into the top layer of gravel, then add water to the container so the roots can reach it through the gravel. Make sure to add water every two or three days and keep the water level below the base of the bulb.

For the longest bloom time, keep your blooming plants out of direct sunlight and away from drafts and hot air vents. Narcissus are particularly good for planting the bulbs at intervals, so you have color and fragrance for many weeks.

For more information about indoor gardens, contact the (COUNTY NAME) office of the University of Kentucky Cooperative Extension Service.

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