

Forcing Paperwhites

How to get paperwhite bulbs to produce large, long-lasting floral displays



At a Glance

Size: 12-14" tall

Sun: Bright, indirect light until shoots appear, then direct sunlight

Soil: Potting soil, stones, rocks, gravel, marbles, or glass beads. They can also be grown in water alone.

Pots: bulb pans, vases, or decorative containers

Water: Keep soil moist or fill planting medium with water until the roots are covered.

Paperwhites are one of the easiest bulbs to force for cut flowers or displays in the home from December to March. Using alcohol in water will keep plant 1/3 more compact, with flowers just as large, long-lasting, and fragrant as usual.

Where to Plant

Plant indoors using any container filled with 1-2" of potting soil, stones, rock, gravel, marbles, or glass beads. They can also be grown in a container of water alone.

When to Plant

The most popular time to plant is December through March, though they can be planted any time of year.

How to Grow

Position bulbs so that they are nearly touching each other with the pointed end up. If using potting soil, add enough soil to cover only half of the bulbs, allowing the top half to remain exposed. Water well. When using a pebble-like medium or a bulb vase, add water until it just covers the roots. Do not allow bulbs to sit in water, as it will cause them to rot.

Place containers in a bright, cool room until shoots appear, then move into direct sunlight. Without enough light, they will become leggy and will require staking for support.

Paperwhites begin to bloom 4-8 weeks after potting. For a continuous show of color, start new pots of bulbs every couple of weeks. They bloom only once, so discard bulbs after they've flowered.

Varieties

Ziva and Galilee are fragrant, while Inbal has a lighter fragrance.

Intoxicating Paperwhites

Ethanol alcohol, the kind found in most hard liquors like vodka, gin, rum, and tequila, is an excellent growth regulator for keeping paperwhite plants short and compact while forcing indoors. A 4-5% solution of ethanol will work.

Plant bulbs in stones, rock, gravel, marbles, or glass beads as usual. Moisten with water alone for 7-10 days until

roots and green shoots about 2-3" tall appear. Once this happens, begin watering with the alcohol solution. Most distilled spirits are 40% ethanol alcohol. Make the solution from any distilled spirit that is 40-80% alcohol by volume.

1 part liquor to 9 parts water = 4% solution

1 part liquor to 7 parts water = 5% solution

Use this solution for further watering. This will result in plants about 1/3 more compact, with flowers as large, long-lasting, and fragrant as usual.