

# “Forcing the Issue”

## Forcing Daffodils into Bloom

Forcing is a technique that imitates the environmental conditions that bulbs encounter outdoors, thereby tricking them into flowering earlier. Most bulbs need a chilling or a cold treatment period to flower successfully and put on their best show. **Daffodils** (*Narcissus*) require a minimum cold treatment of 12 weeks, but do best when chilled for 16 weeks. **Paperwhites** (*Narcissus tazetta* cultivars) do not require a chilling period.

For chilling, the basic requirement is a cold, dark space where the temperature is below 50 degrees Fahrenheit and above 32 degrees Fahrenheit—generally between 40-45 degrees Fahrenheit is best. An unheated garage or a cellar is usually an ideal spot. Cold frames and window wells are also suitable—cover over the containers with dry leaves or several inches of straw and lay pine boughs on top to help insulate the bulbs. The vegetable compartment of your refrigerator is also a good option. Store the pots in a plastic bag with air holes punched into it and do not store with fruit such as apples that emit an ethylene gas which is harmful to their growth.

After the appropriate period of chilling time, the pots will start to show top growth and roots should be visible through the drainage holes. Bring the pots into a well-lit, unheated room of your house (approximately 50-65 degrees Fahrenheit) for about a week. If your basement is the right temperature but not bright enough, fluorescent lights will do the trick. During this phase, you do not need direct sunlight, bright light is best—you are simply mimicking the arrival of spring with increased temperature and light. If light is coming from one direction, rotate pots every other day to keep flower stems straight. After this adjustment period you can bright them into a warmer area of the home, but temperatures in the 60s are best for the first three weeks until they are ready to flower.

Exposing bulbs to high heat too soon will cause the stems to elongate then flop, and the flowers may not open. In general, do not place bulb pots close to heating sources—the cooler the location, the longer the bloom.

*Title from “Spring Bulbs” by Peter McHoy  
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Adapted for daffodils only by the Georgia Daffodil Society*