

MSU Extension Publication Archive

Archive copy of publication, do not use for current recommendations. Up-to-date information about many topics can be obtained from your local Extension office.

Home Forcing of Spring Flowering Bulbs

Michigan State University

Cooperative Extension Service

Home and Family Series

A.A. De Hertough and W. H. Carlson, Department of Horticulture

October 1967

6 pages

The PDF file was provided courtesy of the Michigan State University Library

Scroll down to view the publication.



home forcing

of Spring

Flowering Bulbs

EXTENSION BULLETIN 593 • HOME AND FAMILY SERIES • OCTOBER 1967

Cooperative Extension Service Michigan State University

BY A. A. DE HERTOGH AND W. H. CARLSON
Department of Horticulture

FILE COPY
DO NOT REMOVE

CAUSING SPRING BULBS TO FLOWER by other than naturally occurring conditions is called *forcing*. This is a practice carried out by commercial growers the world over. With a little care and effort, anyone can have a steady supply of bulb flowers from late January through April. Using certain procedures and specific bulbs, it is possible to have flowers prior to January. Forcing bulbs should be a challenge to those who are interested in plants.

GENERAL INFORMATION

The steps involved in forcing are quite simple.

(1) The proper cultivars (cultivated varieties) must be selected for the desired flowering periods. This is necessary since all cultivars are not suitable for all flowering periods. The table on page 5 lists some cultivars which are best suited for pots for the various months.

(2) The bulbs must be planted and given a cold treatment with temperatures ranging from 35 degrees to 48 degrees F. This cold treatment can be provided by either a cold-frame or an unheated cellar. Regardless of the method used, the bulbs must be rooted and stored for a minimum of 13 weeks.

(3) They should be carried into the house for flowering. On the average, the bulbs will take about 3 to 4 weeks to flower. During this time you will be able to enjoy a growing plant.

MATERIALS

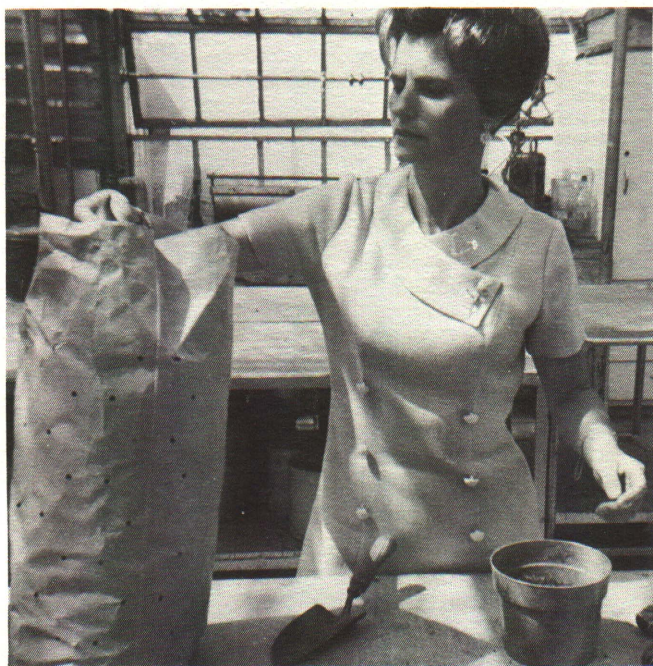
Bulbs—The selection of the proper cultivars for the desired period is very important. The following table describes several cultivars which are suitable for pot plants for the various months. It is strongly suggested since some varieties (see the table) may be in short supply, that you place your bulb order with your dealer in the spring to make sure he will have them in the fall.

Planting Medium—The purpose of the planting medium is to anchor the bulbs and to serve as a supply of moisture. Thus, the planting medium must be *well-drained* and yet retain sufficient moisture. A good mixture would be 1 part loamy soil, 1 part peat, and 1 part sand. Fertilizer should not be added to the mixture.

Containers—Use only clean pots with adequate drainage holes. If they have been previously used, scrub the pots and rinse thoroughly. If they are new plastic pots, be sure that there are holes in the bottom of the pot. When clay pots are to be used, soak them over-night so they will not draw moisture from the planting medium.

PROCEDURES

Handling of bulbs prior to planting—It is extremely important that all bulbs be handled with care at all times. They are living plants and should not be



1. Unpacking the Bulbs



2. Filling Pots with Soil



7. The Finished Pot



8. Various Stages of Potting

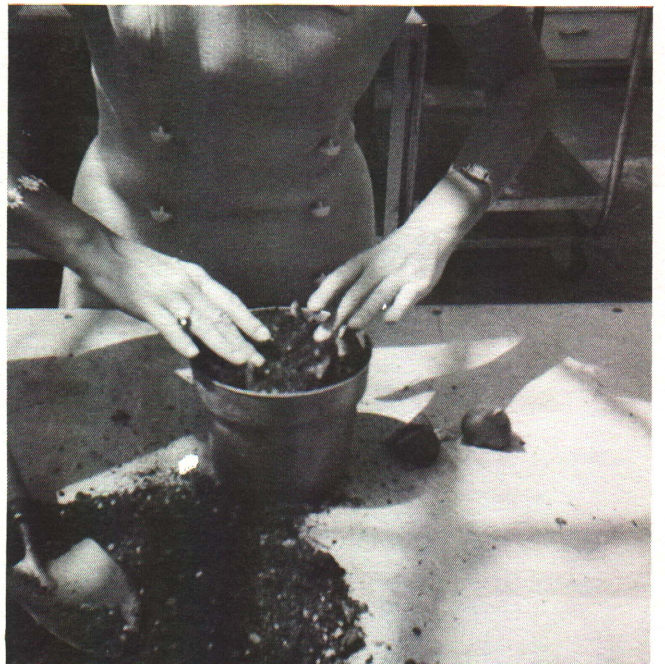
dropped or subjected to extreme temperatures. After purchasing, be sure that the bulbs are kept *well-ventilated*. If they are in paper bags, open the bag to allow maximum air movement. If possible, store them on open racks. Keep the bulbs in a room with a temperature between 55 degrees and 63 degrees F. Bulbs can be stored for several weeks at these temperatures.

Temperatures above 63 degrees F. should be avoided at all times.

Planting — Planting can take place any time from October 1 to December 1, depending on the desired date of flowering, the type of storage used, and the prevailing weather. As a general rule, for late flower-



5. Covering Bulbs with Soil



6. Leveling Soil in Pot



11. Setting Pots in a Cold-Frame



12. Watering the Pots

of the bulb will be facing the outside of the pot (See Figure 4). When this is done, the first big leaf of the plant will face outward and an attractive pot will be obtained at flowering.

Do not press the bulbs into the soil. The soil under the bulbs should be loose so that good rooting can take place quickly. When covering bulbs, do not fill

the entire pot (See Figures 5, 6, and 7). Fill only to within $\frac{1}{4}$ of an inch of the top so the plants can be more easily watered.

Remember to *label each pot* (See Figures 9 and 10) with the name of the cultivar, date of planting, and date to be placed in the house.

Tulips, Hyacinths, Daffodils, and Crocus Suitable for Forcing

Type of bulbs	Time of flowering	
	January and February	March and April
TULIP	<u>Red</u> - Cassini, Paul Richter, Prominence, Christmas Marvel, Topscore, Trance, Charles, Bing Crosby, Olaf <u>Yellow</u> - Levant, Bellona <u>White</u> - Snow Star, Pax <u>Salmon</u> - Apricot Beauty <u>Variiegated</u> - Madame Spoor, Merry Widow, Roland <u>Pink</u> - Preludium	<u>Red</u> - Couleur Cardinal, Red Queen, Utopia, Robinea <u>Yellow</u> - Makassar, Ornament <u>White</u> - Blizzard <u>Orange</u> - Orange Sun <u>Variiegated</u> - Carl M. Bellman, Golden Eddy, United Europe, Edith Eddy, Paris <u>Pink</u> - Pink Supreme, Peerless Pink, Rose Beauty
HYACINTH	<u>Red</u> - Jan Bos <u>Pink</u> - Anna Marie, Eros, Lady Derby <u>Blue</u> - Ostara, Bismark <u>White</u> - Carnegie, L'Innocence	<u>Pink</u> - Lady Derby, Pink Pearl, Marconi <u>Blue</u> - Ostara, Blue Giant, Perle Brillante <u>White</u> - Carnegie
DAFFODIL	King Alfred, Golden Harvest, Carlton	Gold Medal, Rembrandt, Van Sion, Geranium, Cheerfulness
CROCUS	Remembrance, Pickwick, Joan of Arc, Grand Maitre, Peter Pan	Pickwick, Peter Pan, Joan of Arc, Remembrance, Grand Maitre

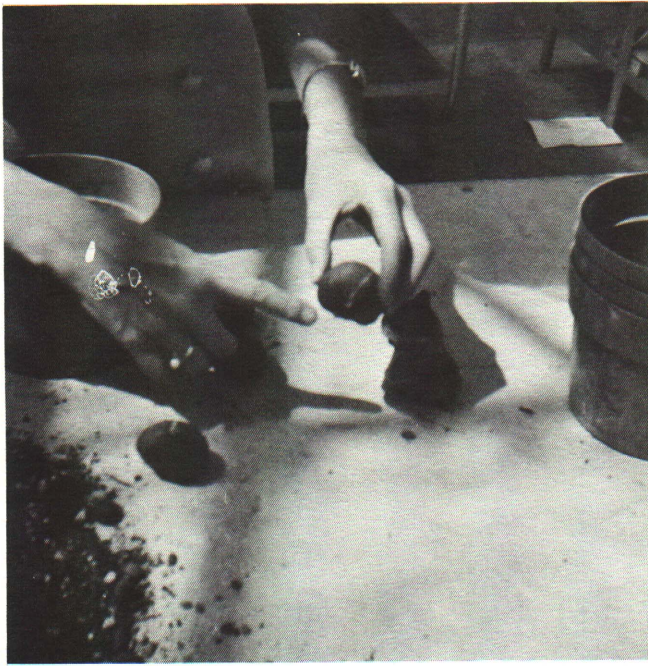
Cold Treatment— After planting, two procedures are available for forcing. The first and by far the most convenient method is the use of indoor cold-storage such as a vegetable or unheated cellar. As long as the temperatures run between 35 degrees and 48 degrees F., any type of structure can be used very successfully. It is a good practice to stagger the time of planting as previously suggested. After placing the pots in the unheated cellar, *water them well*. A good root system is essential, and this cannot be obtained without proper watering. The bulbs should be watered frequently, making sure that the soil is kept moist.

The second method which can be used is using a cold-frame (See Figure 11). The cold-frame should be constructed on a well-drained piece of land and preferably in a shaded area which does not receive heat from the house. After the pots are placed in the cold-frame, *water them well* (See Figure 12). After watering, the pots should be covered. There are various covering materials which may be used. These include sand, peat, and sawdust. More recently it has been found that shredded polystyrene is excellent as a cover for bulbs. If this type of material is used, it will have to be covered with wire screening or some similar material to prevent blowing of the polystyrene.

The material offers many advantages since it is light-weight, never freezes, allows water to pass through rapidly and the bulbs may be inspected at any time during the forcing period. When using a cold-frame, stagger the plantings and remember that the last planting should be done at least 3 weeks prior to hard freezes. If the rains are infrequent, it will be necessary to water to ensure that the pots are kept moist.

Forcing the bulbs— After a minimum of 13 weeks of cold, the first bulbs may be placed in the house. If the first planting was made on October 1, the first plants may be taken into the house right after Christmas. For a continuous supply of flowers, bring in a few pots at weekly intervals. In the house, place the plants in an area with a temperature of approximately 60 degrees F. For best results, do not place in direct sunlight. The plants will require about 3 to 4 weeks to flower. Since the bulb contains most of the plant food it needs, it is not necessary to fertilize. Bulbs which have been forced indoors are usually of little value for outdoor plantings. There are, of course, exceptions to this rule.

For additional and more complete information on home forcing of bulbs, it is suggested that you consult the references listed on the last page.



3. Observing Flat Side of Bulb



4. Correct Placement of Bulbs in Pot



9. Marking Individual Pot Labels



10. Placing Labels in the Pots

ing, plant late, and for early flowering, plant early. Remember the minimum length of the cold treatment should be 13 to 14 weeks.

For flowering in late January, the planting must be done around October 1. For February flowering, the bulbs should be planted in mid-October and for March and April, in mid-November.

When planting, (See Figures 1-8) the pot should be loosely filled with enough soil so that the top of the bulb will be even with the top of the pot (See Figures 2, 4, and 5). Place 6 tulips, 3 hyacinths, 6 daffodils, or 15 crocus to a 6-inch pot. When planting tulips, you will note that they have a round side and a flat side (See Figure 3). Plant them so that the flat side

REFERENCES

1. *Flowering Bulbs for Winter Windows*, Marian C. Walker, D. Van Nostrand, Inc., Princeton, New Jersey. 1965. \$4.95
2. *Handbook on Bulbs*, Brooklyn Botanic Gardens, Brooklyn, New York. 1959. \$1.00.
3. *Indoor Forcing of Dutch Bulbs*, Netherlands Flower-Bulb Institute, 29 Broadway, New York, New York. \$0.25.