

Growing Paperwhites

To bring spring into your home a few months early, try forcing paperwhites. The Paperwhite Narcissus is a type of daffodil native to the western Mediterranean. They produce 2 to 20 small but fragrant white flowers on each flowering stalk. They are different from regular daffodils because they do not need cold to force them into bloom.



To get paperwhites to bloom, all you need is water, sunlight, time, and patience. You can plant the bulbs in a pot with potting medium; you can place them on gravel so the roots can grow into the water between the rocks; or you can use a glass planter with water only.

Place the bulb pointed side up so that half to three-quarters of it shows above the surface of the medium. They look better in a large group so fit them tightly. Add water so that the level just reaches the base of the bulbs. Don't cover the entire bulb as this could cause it to rot. Check your bulbs daily to see if they need more water.

Although paperwhites do not require a period of cold and darkness to bloom, it's still a good idea to start them in a cool, dark location. When you see the roots developing, move to a sunny location. They will bloom 2 to 6 weeks after planting, depending on conditions. Once the plants flower, they will last longer if moved out of direct sunlight to a cool spot with indirect or diffused light.

Research at Cornell University has shown that by mixing alcohol with water, your paperwhites will grow shorter and not fall over. The bulb will be $\frac{1}{3}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ shorter, but with flowers just as large, fragrant, and long lasting as usual. Use ordinary rubbing (isopropyl) alcohol to a dilution of 1 part alcohol to 10 to 11 parts water. Wait until the roots are growing and the shoot is green and growing about 1 to 2 inches above the bulb. At this point, pour off the water and replace it with the alcohol water. Then, simply use this solution for further irrigation.

Because paperwhites do not re-bloom, generally they can be discarded after they have finished blooming.

Johnson's carries all the supplies you will need to successfully plant paperwhites, including bulbs, low dishes, and glass containers.

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