



## Blooming Bulb Containers

*Flowering bulbs are a wonderful addition to container gardening. Here are two ways to add lovely blooms year-round:*

*bulbs for indoor winter bloom or early spring bloom — step by step*

- ❖ Hyacinth, tulip, daffodil and small bulbs such as snowdrops, crocus, scylla and muscari are the best choices for forcing.
- ❖ The ideal time for this project is from October 1<sup>st</sup> – 15<sup>th</sup>.
- ❖ Collect or buy plastic pots, 6-10” in diameter; “azalea” pots are short and squat and will work the best.
- ❖ Partially fill the pots with high-quality potting soil, such as Sunagro. The amount will depend on how big your pots are, so more specifically, add enough potting soil so bulbs are placed as follows:
  - hyacinths and tulips – only the tip of the bulb should show above the soil line
  - daffodils – one-half of the bulb should show above the soil line
  - small bulbs – should be placed so they will be about 1” below the soil line
- ❖ For a 6” pot you will need 6 tulips, 3 hyacinths, 5 daffodils or 15 small bulbs - adjust accordingly for slightly larger pots.
- ❖ Bulbs should be close to each other but not touching. Nestle the bulbs in so their points face up. Tulips have a flat side as well, which should be toward the outside of the pot. The soil line should be about ½” below the rim of the pot.
- ❖ Or, using a 12-15” or deeper pot, successively layer a combination of bulbs on a bottom layer of about 3” of potting mix.
- ❖ For the combination, the latest blooming will be the planted deepest: begin with 3 tulips, cover with soil, then 5 daffodils, more soil, next 5 hyacinths, more soil, and last, two layers of 10-20 small bulbs such as crocus, muscari or species tulips.
- ❖ Place the pots in a sink or bucket of tepid water that reaches within an inch of the rim, until the surface of the soil is damp.
- ❖ Keep the bulbs where the temperature is between 35° and 48° – this is tricky because average St. Louis temperatures do not consistently get into the 40’s until the end of November. An unheated garage, crawl space or under a porch might help keep the bulbs cool if we get a run of spring-like weather. If you have available refrigerator space that would be ideal. Do not store with ripening fruit as it gives off ethylene gas which may cause the embryonic flower inside the bulb to die.
- ❖ The soil should be kept slightly moist - not overwatered! Light is not necessary until after the cooling period. There is also no need for fertilization.
- ❖ The roots will begin to develop soon after potting and they will need some time to establish before the possibility of a hard freeze. Pots kept outdoors, in unheated garages, under porches, etc. will need to be rooting for at least 3 weeks before they are exposed to a hard freeze. This does not apply to bulbs in pots that are kept indoors or in a refrigerator.
- ❖ After 12-14 weeks of cooling (around mid-January, depending on when you started), you can start bringing your pots inside. You don’t have to bring them all in at once – bring one or two inside at weekly intervals to extend your enjoyment.
- ❖ If the soil and top-growth are frozen when you bring them in, let them thaw out for 2 or 3 days in a cool room (40°).
- ❖ Place the pots in bright, indirect light, where temperatures are ideally about 60°, so that top growth and buds can develop.
- ❖ When the flower buds are almost open, set your pots on display, but still away from direct sunlight, radiators or heat vents.
- ❖ Another alternative is to leave the bulb pots outdoors in a protected area until danger of frost has passed. Then move to a sunny spot to have an outdoor containerized display of spring blooms more or less at the same time they are blooming in the garden. This works particularly well with the larger, combination pots.
- ❖ Most bulbs struggle to reestablish in the garden after being forced, but if you keep the foliage green and healthy until their natural spring blooming time, you can try planting them outside. Daffodils are the most resilient so they’re worth a try!

## non-hardy bulbs for summer bloom – step by step

- ❖ Summer blooming bulbs are heat-lovers and growing them in pots is an excellent way to jump-start the summer season.
- ❖ Once they are potted up they should be kept in a sunny, protected location such as a south-facing window, sunroom or greenhouse until overnight temperatures are consistently above 50°, when they may be moved to their outdoor site.
- ❖ Bulbs are happier left undisturbed so choose containers suitable for the ultimate size of the plant. Choose a light-weight container following the minimum size guidelines but remember that larger pots will give the plants more room to develop.
- ❖ Excellent drainage and fertility is essential; fill containers with equal parts of Dr. Earth Compost, Turface, and potting soil.
- ❖ Add slow-release fertilizer such as Espoma Bulb-tone (3-5-3). In subsequent springs, just scratch it into the soil surface.
- ❖ Bulbs do better when potted separately so they receive individualized care. For variety and contrast, the pots may then be rearranged throughout the blooming season to show off their flowers and foliage, their differing heights and textures.
- ❖ Pre-moisten the planting mix and place the bulbs at the correct depth, firming the soil around them. Dahlias, gladiolas and lilies will require support and stakes should be installed at planting time and kept in the pots permanently.
- ❖ In early spring, when it is still relatively cool and the plants are small, water needs will be minimal. Overwatering may lead to rot. As the roots fill the pot and temperatures rise, increase as needed. Later, daily watering may become necessary.
- ❖ These are high-energy plants. Toward the end of spring, begin to supplement with water-soluble fertilizer such as Jack's Bloom Booster (10-30-20) or Nature's Source (10-4-3) every other week until the end of summer.
- ❖ Most summer blooming bulbs need a rest period. Bring them inside before any risk of frost and let them dry out. Put them in a dry, dark place kept at room temperature – under the basement stairs is ideal.
- ❖ Depending on the plant, the foliage will turn yellow and soft or tan and crisp – just pull it off with a slight tug.
- ❖ Some plants are equally happy spending their downtime as a houseplant – see notes in the list below.
- ❖ After two to three years in its pot, you may wish to refresh the plant. Take it out of its pot, knocking off loose soil without breaking up the main root mass, and gently replace it in the same pot with fresh soil mix, using the same ratios as above.

Botanical/Common Name	Pot Size	Light	Notes
<i>Alocasia-Colocasia-Xanthosoma</i> /Elephant Ears	1 per 12” pot	S/PtS/ Shade	Easy to overwinter; low maintenance; likes heat, humidity and moisture; some may winter well as houseplants or store dry in pots
<i>Begonia</i> (Tuberosa Group)	3 per 15” pot	PtSun/ Shade	Easy to grow; dislikes heat and humidity; upright or cascading forms; keep moist until flowering ceases in autumn; store dry in pots
<i>Caladium</i>	1 per 8” pot	PtSun/ Shade	Easy to grow; needs warmth and humidity; likes fertile soil and even moisture; start early in smaller pot with bottom heat
<i>Canna</i>	1 per 12” pot	Sun	Low maintenance; needs room to grow; loves heat; no staking needed; blooms mid-summer to frost; deadhead regularly
<i>Dahlia</i>	1 per 8” pot	Sun/ PtSun	Needs space and regular watering; protect from too much heat with double pot and/or mulch; great cut flower; deadhead regularly
<i>Lilium/Lily</i>	3 per 12” pot	Sun/ PtSun	Easy to overwinter; plant promptly and deeply; protect from too much heat with double pot and/or mulch; fragrant cut flower
<i>Oxalis</i> /False Shamrock	5 per 6” pot	Sun/ PtSun	Easy to overwinter; low maintenance; long blooming; needs regular moisture; companion to taller bulbs; bring in as winter houseplant
<i>Polianthes tuberosa</i> /Tuberose	3 per 10” pot	Sun/ PtSun	Easy to overwinter; low maintenance; loves warmth, moisture and fertilizer; divide every two years; allow dormancy after flowering
<i>Zantedeschia</i> /Calla	3 per 12” pot	Sun/ PtSun	Easy to overwinter; keep moist; likes fertilizer; long-lasting cut flower from mid-summer to frost; deadhead promptly

- ❖ Some of the above information adapted from *Forcing Bulbs for Indoor Bloom* <http://extension.missouri.edu/p/G6550> and *Spring/Summer Flowering Bulbs Cultural Instructions* [https://www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com/resources/show\\_list/id/20](https://www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com/resources/show_list/id/20)