

# WINTER'S Best Blooms

Add life to your home with forced bulbs. If you prefer color and greenery to bare trees and stark landscapes, check out our indoor growing tips from local horticultural experts. Their advice for forcing bulbs in winter will have you gazing at blooms in no time. —Chrysa M. Smith

## WHAT IS FORCING?

To everything there is a season, but by creating natural light and springtime temperatures, horticulturists can force certain bulbs to bloom out of their natural cycle. “To do it, bulbs must go through their normal sequence,” says John Story, general manager of the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society’s Meadowbrook Farm facility. That means bulbs must undergo a period of cool storage or dormancy followed by a warming that incites a bloom period.

The concept is pretty simple, but success comes with following directions carefully. Jürgen Steininger, a specialty grower at Longwood Gardens, offers these tips: when buying, inspect each bulb, avoiding those with spider-like mites and mold; plant them in odd numbers and put them in soil within a week of taking them home.

## EASY BULB-FORCING HOW-TO:

Once you have the bulbs, follow Steininger’s instructions for creating thriving blooms:

**Tools:** Before you begin, you’ll need a clean clay pot (standard pot or bulb pans work well), commercially available potting media, the bulbs, a date book and a thermometer.

**Soil:** Steininger recommends Sunshine Mix 4, Fafard 3B Mix or other peat-based potting media.

**Construction:** Good drainage prevents waterlogging,

so use a sand-potting media mixture for optimal results. Combine one-third sand (Steininger recommends graded No. 3 sand) with two-thirds potting media. Fill the pot one-third of the way with the mix, then add the bulbs. Top the bulbs with another layer of mix

**Cooling:** Cooling can be done in an old refrigerator. A cold basement or shed will suffice, though both

may require additional time. The cooling temperature should be between 34 and 48 degrees, and the bulbs should remain there for 10 to 14 weeks.

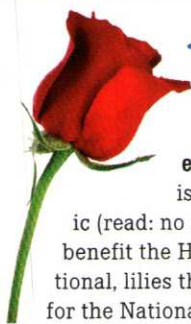
**Warming:** Move the bulbs into a room with the temperature set to around 60 degrees. Place them in indirect sunlight (that’s Eastern exposure). After two or three weeks, you’ll have blooming flowers.

BULB	CONDITIONS
Narcissus Rijnveld’s “Early Sensation”	10 weeks cooling; 15 days of forcing until bloom
Hyacinths: “Blue Jacket,” “Pink Pearl” and “White pearl”	In a hyacinth cup with water or a pot: 10 to 12 weeks cooling; 20 to 25 days of forcing until bloom
Tulip “Friso” and “Ile de France” tulip	12 to 14 weeks cooling; 25 days of forcing until bloom
Lily and Asiatic hybrid lily	Using prepared bulbs doesn’t require chilling; 60 to 90 days at 65 degrees until bloom
“Harmony” Iris reticulata (Dwarf Iris)	10 to 12 weeks of cooling; 10 to 15 days of forcing until bloom

TULIP PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/ALISON CORNFORD-MATHESON; HYACINTH PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/DIGITALIS; LILY PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/STEVE MCSWEENEY; IRIS PHOTO BY ISTOCKPHOTO.COM/TATIANA LEBEDEVA

# Good GIVING

When social invitations come pouring in this holiday season, don't stress about dropping dollars on gifts for hosts and hostesses. Pick one of STYLE's four favorite party gifts, and part of the money you spend will go to a good cause. Plus, you won't have to give a friend a card that reads, "A donation in your name has been made to..." —Shannon Grotzinger



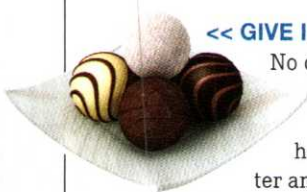
## << STOP AND SMELL THE ROSES

Flowers smell sweeter when part of the cost is donated to charity.

For around \$60 you can pick up flowers from [OrganicBouquet.com](http://OrganicBouquet.com). The lavish displays are USDA certified organic (read: no nasty pesticides). Purchase roses that benefit the Humane Society or Amnesty International, lilies that aid Earth Share or gerbera daisies for the National Wildlife Federation.



<< TRIM THE TREE Buy a beautiful bauble for your host's tree and help fund a camping trip for children with cancer. Browse products online at [ChildrensArtProject.org](http://ChildrensArtProject.org) and admire the crafts produced during weeklong arts and adventure trips for children with cancer. We love the **Bird and Holly Radko ornament** (\$45) designed by 18-year-old Vanessa. Don't forget the matching Bird and Holly stationery (\$8) so that your hostess can write her thank-you notes.



## << GIVE IN TO CHOCOLATE CRAVINGS

No one can pass up chocolate. No one. And who could possibly resist organic chocolate truffles that help provide cleaner drinking water and agricultural skills to communities in the Ethiopian highlands, Bangladesh and Niger? Visit [ChocAid.com](http://ChocAid.com) and buy a set of **fair trade champagne truffles for about \$10**. A specific number code comes with the chocolate, allowing the recipient to complete the donation process.



<< LIGHT A CANDLE Treat your favorite eco-friend with a **Dirt candle**. It may sound messy, but the morals behind the company are as clean as can be. The all-natural biodegradable candles are made with organic soybeans grown stateside and are packaged using recycled glass and paper. Part of the cost of the candle will benefit organizations like the Make A Wish Foundation, the American Cancer Society or Big Brothers Big Sisters. Pick up a holiday scent like Bah Humbug or Gingerbread (both \$24) at South Moon Under (1731 Chestnut St., 215-563-2298).

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