

Home/Garden

Bulbs for forcing and a foretaste of spring

While you are planting your spring bulbs, you might want to think about keeping a few aside to force and bring out during the holidays, or to assuage that depressing post-holiday letdown. Or treat yourself to a whole sampler of bulbs, big and little, bold and delicate, to lighten the dog days of winter.

Everybody thinks of the delicate and sweetly scented paper white narcissus when they think of forcing bulbs, but you can force almost any bulb successfully, like the bulbs like crocus and grape hyacinth, miniature daffodils like the two-toned Minnow, or the unusual Yellow Hoop Petticoat, regular narcissus and daffodils, or edips and hyacinths which look so dramatic in a pot. You can even force lillies of the valley (Convallaria).

No matter what type of bulb you want to force, the principle is the same. You want to trick the bulb into thinking it has gone through the winter by keeping it cold and dark. When enough time has gone by, your gullible bulbs will bring an early spring to your windowsill and soul.

Many people force the standard paper white narcissus in a low container filled with white pebbles — and a few bits of charcoal to keep the water sweet. I have a lovely gray bowl that was given to me that I plant this way. I think it looks very spare and fresh when the narcissus are in bloom.

A bowl, pebbles and a few bulbs really make a great gift. I half fill the shallow bowl with pebbles and a few bits of charcoal. Then I arrange the bulbs, making sure the edges don't touch, pour a few more pebbles in around the bulbs to help hold them in place and then water. When the bowl is prepared I'll put it in my dark cellar where the temperatures range between 35 to 45 degrees for 12 or 14 weeks.

However, I also like to put bulbs in regular flower pots with potting soil. So-called azalea pots are ideal because they're not too deep, but have a large center. I crack it with pebbles so that the drainage holes will not become clogged making the soil sodden enough to rot the bulbs. All potted plants must be given soil that drains well.

I partially fill the pot with potting soil, arrange the bulbs so they do not touch and then fill the pot until the bulbs are just covered. For the most part bulbs provide all the food they need for that: first blooming, but I usually mix in a tablespoon of bonemeal into the soil for each pot.

After watering it's time to put them in the cool dark, again for 12 or 14 weeks. You'll have to check the bulbs during this time and give them an occasional water-

Pat Leuchtman
Between The Rows



ing. Or you can place the pots inside a black plastic bag and fasten it shut. This will help cut down on watering.

Many people who don't have a cellar like mine, have an extra refrigerator that they use for all those cold drinks in summer. This refrigerator will keep bulbs perfectly cool and dark.

After 12 weeks or so, it will be time to bring the bulbs into the house. Don't put them directly in a warm, sunny window. Remember, you are simulating winter and the arrival of spring. Spring does not happen overnight. Bring the bulbs into a room that is cool and not sunny. Give them time to adjust and turn green before bringing them into a warmer room with full sun.

While they are blooming you can put them anywhere you like, but flowers will last a little longer if you keep them cool (65 degrees or less) and out of direct sunlight.

So many people find pleasure in forcing bulbs that some florists and garden centers sell bulbs that have already been precooled and will bloom much quicker than regular bulbs. They will cost a little more, but it means you won't have to wait as long for flowers. This is especially nice when you are feeling dull some dreary winter day. Give in to impulse and buy a few of these bulbs to enjoy the fresh green foliage and soon the loveliness of the flower — and even the fragrance.

Paper whites, hyacinths and lilies of the valley are all noted for their scent. Prepared lily of the valley pips can bloom in just 30 days.

New gardeners always ask if they can plant the bulbs they have forced outside when spring really arrives. You certainly have nothing to lose if you try. Sometimes, I've planted forced bulbs outdoors and sometimes they do eventually gain enough strength to bloom again.

If you want to try this, don't just hide the dying foliage in some corner after the flowers are done. Just as you cannot cut down bulb foliage for six weeks when it's done blooming outside, so you have to allow the foliage of forced bulbs to rest in the sun, gathering food that can be stored in the bulb and for another round of bloom



Time to buy a head

Heads of Sunderland cabbage fill a bushel basket. Late cabbages are now being harvested.

Recorder/Chuck Blake

Wood foundations: Here to stay?

By PETER TONGE
The Christian Science Monitor

NEVADA, Iowa — It came as no surprise to those who know Sam McHose that he should start developing a town-house complex in this Iowa community soon after he retired from banking.

But what surprised those familiar with his background was his choice of construction materials.

Mr. McHose, steeped in concrete and masonry traditions, managed the family brick and tile plant at one stage. But he elected to go the all-wood route — right down to and including the foundations!

His research had turned up some surprising facts about the modern, all-wood foundation: It is permanent, warm, waterproof, and all but immune to condensation problems.

"I've never walked into the basement of a wood-foundation home and found it musty," he says.

What appeals to McHose is confirmed by a growing range of homeowners and builders. The pluses for the permanent all-wood foundation are many, they say, and list them as:

- **Liability.** The basements have the same feel and comfort of the above-ground section of the house. Because wood conducts heat away from the basement at a much slower rate than concrete, it is far less prone to clamminess and mildew problems in summer.

- **Energy efficient.** For the same reason, the all-wood basement is less costly to heat in winter. The fact that the basement wall is the same stud-frame construction as the walls above the ground makes it a simple matter to incorporate insulation as well.

- **Simple to finish.** With nailable studs already in place, plumbing and wiring are readily hidden, and gypsum board or paneling is easily

- **Provides more living space.** To be finished off, a conventional concrete wall foundation has to have a stud frame placed on the interior to accommodate the insulation and the paneling. Combine this with the fact that the wood foundation is marginally narrower than a concrete-block wall (though not necessarily less than a poured wall), and the additional living space becomes obvious.

- **To these pluses, builders add a couple more:**

- **Speed of erection.** Many builders say that a wood foundation can be in place in a day. While some elect to build the foundation from scratch at the site, others prefer to preassemble the panels in the workshop and truck them to the work site.

- **Ease of waterproofing.** All concrete shrinks and consequently cracks in some places. But the wood foundation, using approved pressure-treated lumber, will not shrink and is readily waterproofed. Says Clarence Buerman, a builder in Cold Spring, Minn., of the permanent

wood foundation, "(It's) the only system we guarantee to stay dry."

In brief, the all-wood foundation

rests on a bed of crushed rock, the thickness of which depends on the characteristics of the surrounding soil. Generally, the more clay, the thicker the layer of rock. Besides supporting the house, the rock also acts as a drain to funnel ground water away from the house.

All materials must meet the standards laid down by the American Wood Preservers Institute, and each piece will be stamped to this effect. Codes demand that the plywood sheets be fastened with stainless-steel nails or staples.

Of course, nothing on this earth is permanent, and Fulton Dessler of the American Plywood Association is the first to agree. But he adds: "We have no hesitation in saying that the (all-wood) foundation will last as long as the house that sits on top of it."

The wood foundation is now approved by the major building code regulatory bodies and by those federal agencies associated with housing. Bankers, too, are happy with the technology, because the major lending and mortgage insurance institutions all accept it.

Garden Calendar

This information is provided by Karen Idoine of the University of Massachusetts Cooperative Extension Service.

Now is the time to:

- try growing two or three different herbs in one hanging pot. For instance, parsley in the middle surrounded by trailing rosemary and creeping thyme will make a lovely and edible combination. Be sure the soil is light and rich in organic matter and that the pot has sufficient drainage. Herbs like a sunny, cool window. Avoid overwatering.

- cover bulb plantings with 1- to 1½-inch mesh chicken wire if chipmunks, mice or squirrels are digging up newly planted bulbs. Fasten in place with pegs, rocks, or bury the ends in the soil.

- make a note of shrubs that display attractive fall color.

- cut your grass as long as it keeps growing. Then, after the last mowing, prepare your lawnmower for winter storage using the following checklist:

- drain the gas tank, or run the engine until fuel is gone

- clean dirt and grease from engine parts, disconnect sparkplug wire before working near the blade, then clean blade housing and spay with light coating of oil or other rust retardant

- drain and replace crankcase oil
- remove, clean and gap the sparkplug

- while plug is out, squirt a tablespoon of oil into cylinder and pull starter cord to distribute oil, then replace the plug

- paint bare metal with rust retardant paint

- store mower in a dry location

HOME OWNERS SAVE \$\$ Money On Aluminum Restoration

1. Enormous savings compared to alternatives
2. Restores aluminum siding back to original color
3. Increase value of your home
4. Looks like new!

FREE ESTIMATE and DEMONSTRATION (802) 257-1757



BULBS
King Alfred Daffodil
5 for \$2.99
HEMENWAY'S GARDEN CENTER
Rte. 5 & 10, Old Deerfield

