

AGRICULTURE

Many bulbs can be forced for early blooming

•Mulches are invaluable in any planting area. They provide a protective layer that will prevent evaporation, control weeds, guard against "heaving" from severe cold, and when decomposing, enriches the soil.

fertilizer as well as mulch. Salt hay is excellent, as it takes several years to degrade.

Hurry Up and Wait

Many bulbs qualify for forcing, which is defined as the deceptive use of light and temperature, resulting in blooming in 12 to 15 weeks instead of the usual span of five to six months.

Now that we are experiencing some cool weather, we should plan for our early spring treat. (Bulbs forced in containers should be kept between 40 and 50 degrees.)

This climate can be created by using an indoors storage area such as a cool garage or greenhouse, or using a trench or cold frame in the outdoors, which protects bulbs from excessive cold.

A favorite bulb for forcing is the dependable and aromatic Paper White narcissus, but why not try tulips, hyacinths, iris reticulata, scilla and crocus, as we suggested in an earlier article?

While containers of plastic or metal or ceramic composition will do, most people prefer the old-

fashioned clay pot. If you use new ones for this method of growing flowers, try to remember to soak the pots in water for 24 hours before using them.

I have, however, had great success with narcissus planted on top of gravel, nestled in only enough to insure stability, growing in a water tight container, with the water filled to the height of the bottom of the bulb. Narcissus prepared in this manner should be treated subsequently as any other bulbs we discuss.

I have used a mixture of potting soil, peat and sand, but John Pelring of WGBH's Victory Garden writes in Horticulture Magazine that they have great success with perlite.

Now let's plant, counting on 12 weeks development before you want the actual flower. I plan to start some in the next three weeks, and stagger the blooms over several weeks. Put a piece of broken clay pot over the hole in the bottom of your pot to prevent soil from clogging up, or draining out.

Fill pot half full. Put the bulbs in so that their tops will be just below the rim of the pot. Add more soil, stopping below the bulb tip. Put a label on the pot; type bulb, color, when planted, and a projected date of removal from its storage area.

Water well. If pots are stored inside, they must have complete darkness and regular watering.

Outside, dig a bed three inches deeper than the pots. Put sand or perlite on bottom. Set the pots in, cover with more sand or perlite, and then place a six inch high mound of dirt on top of that.

If you are concerned about drainage you may want to dig an auxiliary trench adjacent to the bed. Water regularly until it freezes.

In ten to 12 weeks, check a pot for visible roots around the drainage hole. There will be some top growth, which will be blanched white from lack of light.

Move the pots indoors to a cool spot with indirect light, watering well. After a while the shoots will turn green. Then it is time to put them in

full sun where it is about 60 degrees at the maximum.

You may have to water them everyday at this point. When the flower appears, put in indirect light to prolong blooming.

After flowering you can discard the bulbs in the compost pile, don't just throw them away. But Mr. Pelrine

encourages gardeners to give the bulbs another try.

He suggests nurturing the bulbs, while in the pot with half-strength fertilizer every two weeks. In the spring, plant bulbs at the recommended depth for another blooming later on. Most of the time you will have success.



Seashore gardeners can make use of several products of the beach and marshes. Collect native eel grass and other seaweeds. Round up scrub oak leaves and pine needles. Find yourself a salt hay connection.

Eel grass has a nitrogen content of about two percent, and will serve as a

Seasoned wood is best buy

To get the most for your dollar, buy seasoned hardwoods.

"The amount of heat wood will give off is determined by its weight and moisture content, not by its volume," says Dick Allison, forestry specialist, North Carolina State University. But wood is sold by volume in North Carolina — by the pick-up truck load or by the cord.

That is why people get varying amounts of heat from the same amount of wood. Heavier woods such as hickory will give almost twice the heat of light woods, such as white pine.

The weight of equally dry wood per cubic foot is as follows: hickory, 46; white oak, 45; red oak and beech, 43; sugar maple and birch, 42; ash, 41; slash and longleaf pine, 40; red maple, 37; loblolly and shortleaf pine, 35; sweetgum, tupelo, elm, sycamore and Virginia pine, 34; red cedar, 33; yellow poplar, 30; and white pine, 25.

Any person buying wood also needs to find out when it was cut. "Newly-cut or green wood may be up to 50 percent moisture," Allison says. It is more difficult to burn and much of its heat will be used to evaporate the moisture in the wood rather than to heat the home.

It takes six to eight months to dry firewood properly. Split wood dries faster. "Look at the ends of the logs. Lots of little cracks means the wood has started to dry," says the extension forestry specialist.

The standard cord is the only legally-defined measure of firewood in this state. A cord is a pile of wood four feet high, eight feet long and four feet wide.



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