FORCING BULBS FOR THE HOLIDAYS: BY E. I. FARRINGTON

SEPTEMBER is the month to order the bulbs for holiday blooming. Indeed, this is the month to start forcing the freesia, the development of which requires sixteen weeks. It is not necessary to expatiate on the value of blooming bulbs in the house. Few plants are more satisfactory the winter through and those in bloom at the holiday season make sensible and acceptable gifts. Indeed, it would be a fine thing if much of our giving were confined to flowers and potted plants.

The bulbs which may be forced for Christmas blooming are limited in number, however, and it is well to know what they are in order to avoid disappointment. The Duc van Thols are the tulips worth depending upon for Christmas blooming. Several other tulips, including some of the best singles, may be forced without difficulty to bloom a few weeks later. The names of some of them may be mentioned in passing—Proserpine, a gorgeous, carmine red, which remains in bloom a long time; Yellow Prince, sweet scented; La Reine, white, and Cottage Maid, pink. The Duc van Thols grow about six inches high and are fragrant.

Roman hyacinths and paper white narcissi are among the best of the holiday bulbs. Both are easily forced, but good soil is needed for best results. That from a spent hot bed will answer very well. Mature water given while the bulbs are being forced will help to insure fine flower spikes. Dwarf foliage and strong spikes should be the grower's aim.

The Roman hyacinths look best when grown six or more in a pot, the larger hyacinths with one bulb to a pot. The white Romans flower from one to three weeks earlier than the pinks and blues. The white Italian hyacinths also bloom two weeks later than the white Romans and are somewhat larger. No harm will result if these bulbs are set close enough to touch, but they are not commonly grown so close. Hyacinths of all varieties are better planted before the end of October; if not wanted for forcing until late they may be held back, but they ought to be in soil, at any rate.

The paper white narcissus is one of the best holiday bulbs and should be given the same treatment as the Roman hyacinth, except that while the hyacinth bulb is placed half an inch below the surface, the narcissus bulb should go in an inch deep. Jonquils are handled in the same manner and covered half an inch. Eight bulbs in a six-inch pot make a fine show, with their graceful stems and deep yellow color. They are fragrant, too.

There is no difficulty about growing the popular and sweet scented Chinese lily, provided care is taken to keep it out of draughts and excessive heat, both of which cause the buds to blast. Dry air is bad for this and all bulbs. Sometimes the very best results come from flowering the Chinese lily in the kitchen window. Chinamen grow them in their laundries with the greatest success, because of the moist atmosphere. Though this variety of narcissus can be grown in pots, the more common and better way is to force it in a bowl of water, in which it is held in place by pebbles. The paper white narcissus may be forced in the same manner and with equal success. Indeed, this is a particularly good way to secure a long succession of flowers.
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Success in forcing all these bulbs depends upon getting a strong, vigorous root growth, which is secured by keeping them in a cool, dark place until the roots have become well established. If kept in light and heat, the tops would start at the same time and the competition would be disastrous.

Different people naturally have different methods of starting their bulbs. A common plan is to set them in a dark corner of a cool cellar and to cover them with a foot of earth. Some people dig a little trench in the cellar, set the pots in it and cover them with coal ashes. If the cellar is too warm or otherwise not available, the pots may be set in a cold frame in the open ground. When the latter practice is followed, the plan is to excavate two feet of earth, throw in some ashes, set the pots on the ashes and heap the ashes over them, finally filling in with soil. This is easier than it sounds. The outdoor plan is satisfactory if the ground is well drained and if a covering of manure or other litter is thrown over the spot after the ground has frozen slightly.

My own method is a little unique and can be adopted only by people living in old farmhouses with Dutch ovens. The oven in my house is large enough to hold many pots. It is dark, of course, with the door closed and with the chimney damper open is always cool and well ventilated. The bulbs make a splendid start there and the pots are handled with the greatest ease.

Most of the Dutch bulbs require six weeks in the dark. It is a good plan to examine a pot of bulbs occasionally by digging it up and knocking out the ball of earth. If it is full of roots, it is ready to be forced. Also, if a number of shoots are found poking their heads out of the pot, that is evidence enough that the bulbs are ready to come out of their seclusion. They need plenty of water. A good plan at the start is to stand the pot in water until the soil is well soaked. Watering every ten days may be necessary when the bulbs are in the cellar.

The bulbs grown in water are better for a short time in darkness, but may be started much more quickly than those in soil. And when any of the bulbs are brought into the house it is not well to expose them directly to the light. A wiser plan is to keep them in a cool and dimly lighted room for a week, while they are getting accus-
tomed to the new order of things. The soil in the pots should be kept moist but not wet until the blossoms come. After that no harm will follow if water stands in the saucers. Frequent applications of manure water, say twice a week, will help to make fine flowers. A few hours of direct sunlight, but not too much, improves the color of the blossoms.

Two months should be allowed these Dutch bulbs from the time they are potted, in order to be on the safe side. There is no reason why the bulbs should not be potted early in October and taken into the house at ten-day intervals, thus making a long season. The middle of October is usually set down as the correct potting date for forcing Dutch bulbs of different types.

Freesias and the oxalis—both Cape bulbs, so called because they come from the Cape of Good Hope region—demand an entirely different form of treatment from the Dutch bulbs. With them both roots and tops should grow at the same time, for which reason they require neither darkness nor burial. A light, cool room, a room with a temperature of 50, is best for starting them, and when they are well developed they may be taken to the living room as desired. They are easy to grow if kept away from draughts and excessive heat, both of which cause many failures. They are delightful when grown seven or eight to a five-inch pot, but are not at all satisfactory when grown alone. The bulbs should be placed just a little under the surface. The Dutch bulbs cannot be forced a second time, but the freesia pips may be shaken out when the tops have dried and started again the next fall.

Oxalis bulbs should be started in September and covered an inch. They look best when seven or eight are assigned to a five-inch pot and the pots usually are suspended from chains or placed in hanging baskets. Certainly that is the prettiest way to grow the oxalis.

The loving foresight required to start a bulb in August, destined for a friend's Christmas happiness, surely gives the gift an especial value. Many people enjoy going without some luxury in order to buy a friend a coveted article, but few think of starting a fragrant vase of flowers when the world is full of flowers, to brighten the days when living color has flown from the garden.