



# J&L Garden Center

*The All Season Gift  
and Garden Center*

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## *Growing Paperwhite Narcissi*

Paperwhite bulbs don't need cold treatment like other bulbs. After planting they bloom in 6 - 8 weeks.



### *Planting In Soil-*

Plant 5 - 6 bulbs in a 6" pot. The pot should be at least 5" to 6" deep. Bulb tips should just peek through the soil surface. Make sure the bulbs don't touch each other or the sides of the pots.

Water the bulbs occasionally but do not keep the soil soggy wet. The plants will need more water as the leaves begin to grow and the plants will need even more water once the flowers begin to appear.

Keep pots cool (50° to 55°) and dark until top growth begins. When shoots are about 2" tall bring pots into light to develop flower stalks.

All plants need support. Bright light and cool temperatures (60° to 70°) will help keep narcissi compact.

Florel® growth regulator sprayed on leaves when the leaves are four to five inches tall will also help keep plants compact.

Bulbs started in mid-November will bloom late-December.

### *Planting in Gravel & Water*

Put a layer of gravel in a decorative bowl. The bowl needs to be at least 5" to 6" deep. Arrange bulbs and fill the bowl with gravel. The gravel may be any size or color. Be sure to completely cover the bulbs with gravel to prevent the bulbs from tipping.

Add enough water to only touch the base of the bulbs. Do not let the bulbs sit in water. Check the water level often - too little will dry the roots, and too much will invite decay.

A little charcoal mixed with the gravel will help keep the water fresh.

Keep cool (50° to 55°) and dark until top growth begins. When shoots are about 2" tall bring pots into light to develop flower stalks.

All plants need support. Bright light and cool temperatures (60° to 70°) will help keep narcissi compact.

To help keep plants compact please read the information '[Keep Paperwhites Shorter](#)'.

***Discard Paperwhite Bulbs when they are finished blooming. They are not winter hardy outdoors. They will take two or three years of TLC to bloom again if you do try to keep them.***



# Keep Paperwhites Shorter

## Pickling your Paperwhites -

### Using Alcohol to Reduce Growth of Paperwhite Narcissus

written by William B. Miller, Professor of Horticulture  
Director of the Flowerbulb Research Program, Cornell University

The paperwhite narcissus is a popular bulb for indoor forcing in the winter months. Unlike most other daffodils, paperwhites (*Narcissus tazetta*) do not require a cold period. They are simply planted in pots with soil, or even more commonly, in dishes or bowls with gravel, marbles or other decorative material. With a little water, they rapidly form roots, grow leaves and shoots. The white, fragrant flowers usually open up within 2-3 weeks of planting.

*A common problem with paperwhites, however, is that they often grow too tall and flop over.*

Recent research conducted by the Flowerbulb Research Program at Cornell University has found a simple and effective way to reduce stem and leaf growth of paperwhites. The “secret” is using dilute solutions of alcohol.

*Properly used, the result is paperwhites that are 1/3 to 1/2 shorter, with equal sized flowers that last as long as normal.*

## What to do

We suggest planting your paperwhite bulbs in stones, gravel, marbles, glass beads, etc. as usual. Add water as you normally would, then wait about 1 week until roots are growing, and the shoot is green and growing about 1-2" above the top of the bulb. At this point, pour off the water and replace it with a solution of 4 to 6% alcohol, made from just about any “hard” liquor. You can do the calculations to figure the dilution, but, as an example, to get a 5% solution from a 40% distilled spirit (e.g., gin, vodka, whiskey, rum, tequila), you add 1 part of the booze to 7 parts of water. This is an 8-fold dilution yielding 5% alcohol.

Then, simply use this solution, instead of water, for further irrigation (watering) of your bulbs. It’s as simple as that. The result will be a plant that is 1/3 shorter, but with flowers just as large, fragrant, and long-lasting as usual. But, the plant will be nicely proportioned and won’t need support stakes, wires, or other gizmos to keep it upright. You will see results within just a few days. You can have some fun by doing a simple experiment having one bowl of bulbs given normal water and the other given the alcohol. You will see a dramatic difference, as shown in the picture. This could be a neat activity to occupy kids during the upcoming holiday season!

## A few other thoughts

· Do not use beer or wine, as the sugars in them will cause major problems with the plants.

· As with humans, paperwhites can also suffer alcohol overdoses! We suggest 4-6% alcohol as a normal and safe range. If plants are given much more than 10% alcohol, growth problems will start, and 25% alcohol is dramatically toxic. So, moderation is the key!

· It is not strictly necessary pour off the water after the plants are rooted (as we suggest above). You can just as well add your 5% alcohol without pouring the water off. The result, though, will be a lower than optimal alcohol concentration around the roots, and, ultimately, growth will not be reduced as much as you expect. The reason to pour off the water is to simply maximize the alcohol level around the roots.

· Basically, the higher the alcohol concentration (within reason), the shorter the plants. So it is not critical whether you use 4, 5, or 6% alcohol. Just stay well below 10%, where growth problems become noticeable.

· If you do not have alcohol for consumption in your household, rubbing alcohol (isopropyl alcohol) works just as well. Since this is usually 70% alcohol when purchased, a dilution of 1 part rubbing alcohol to 10 or 11 parts water is appropriate.

· Why does this happen? We are currently working on this, but we feel it is simply “water stress”, where the alcohol makes it more difficult for the plant to absorb water. The plant suffers a slight lack of water, enough to reduce leaf and stem growth, but not enough to affect flower size or flower longevity.

## Paperwhite Varieties

There are several varieties of paper whites available that warrant your attention. Some of them aren’t even white!

**Ziva** is a reliable strain. It produces clusters of pure white blooms with a strong, spicy fragrance on stems averaging 16-18 inches tall. Ziva takes as little as two to four weeks to bloom.

**Inbal** is very similar to Ziva. Inbal only grows 12-14” tall and does not have as strong of a fragrance. Some people like the fragrance of paperwhites, others do not - this variety gives the gardener a choice.

**Galilee** bears pure white blooms with a lighter, musky scent on stems 12- 14 inches tall. It blooms in 3-4 weeks, often having several bloom stems per bulb.

**Grand Soleil d’Or** offers lemon to gold petals around a yellow-orange cup with a delicate sweet fragrance. It grows 12-14 inches tall and blooms in 4-5 weeks.

**Chinese Sacred Lily** has blooms that are white with yellow. It isn’t as strong as some others and needs support, but the fragrance is wonderful!

**Erlicheer -Double Paper Whites** are a wonderful new development. They have a lovely fragrance, too.