



## Forcing Glorious Blooms for Holiday Sales — and Beyond

*Val Schirmer, Three Toads Farm*  
*ASCFG Nashville Grower Meeting - November 4, 2019*

The #1 secret for glorious blooms — the larger the bulb, the greater the show!

How to price: take a look at high-end retailers White Flower Farm ([www.whiteflowerfarm.com](http://www.whiteflowerfarm.com)) and Terrain ([www.shopterrain.com](http://www.shopterrain.com)) and your local high-end florists or nurseries.

### Amaryllis

My favorite bulb options

- Dutch - High quality, highest priced, a lot of varieties and sizes available but rarely forces in time for the holidays
  - Nymph series is great for shorter stems and huge flowers
- Southern Hemisphere - typically smaller (they're older) but MUCH more predictable to force for the holidays
  - South African Hadeco®
  - Peruvian

We promote the size of our bulbs and specialty varieties — it's important to help people understand the difference between what you offer and what's available to them at local big box stores or groceries (and then they'll pay for it)

- Only about 2% of the global amaryllis crop is size 26 cm or larger
- I'm going after the high end of that 2% crop
- Dutch bulbs 36-38 cm, Southern Hemisphere bulbs are generally smaller (because they're older) but try not to go below 30 cm

We sell as

- Bulb alone — \$22, Dutch or S. Hemisphere bulbs
- Started bulb in 6" plastic pot with 2-3+ stems showing — \$30, use S. Hemisphere bulbs only for these
- All-in-one forcing kits — \$45, dormant Dutch bulbs only
- Ready-to-bloom table top bulb gardens — \$95-\$125 and up, S. Hemisphere bulbs

How we sell our bulbs

- Three Toads Farm Flower School — day long hands-on workshop covering everything I know about forcing holiday and spring bulbs. \$365 includes 4 projects; snacks, lunch and specialty cocktail; first dibs on our bulbs; exclusive 20% off all additional bulbs, containers, forcing kits, bulb gardens; and spiral bound color reference notebook
- Rockcastle River Training Company holiday open house — two days, 3 demos/day
  - \*\*\* IF YOU DO DEMOS, YOU CREATE UNDERSTANDING AND DESIRE —> PEOPLE WILL BUY FROM YOU (A LOT) \*\*\*
- Client gifts by high-end interior designers
- Next to try — pop-ups, mail order

Sources for bulbs

- #1 — Gloeckner/Ednie (Fred C. Gloeckner and Ednie Flower Bulbs)
- Secondary — John Scheepers (vs. sister company Van Engelen, which typically has smaller bulbs); White Flower Farm; Colorblends; ADR;

## Amaryllis Forcing Kits

- The container: Ceramo 6" clay rose pot with 7" saucer (we share an order with a local nursery/greenhouse) painted with interior satin paint (give it plenty of time to dry)
- Inside: Brown coffee filter, totally dry ProMix, dormant bulb (keep half of bulb above the soil), Spanish moss, folded growing instructions
  - Create your own growing (and reblooming) instructions branded with your farm name, your contact info, website
- Two size 32 rubber bands
- 88" double-faced satin ribbon
- Color variety tag & description, on back: your farm name/logo, To and From
  - [www.avery.com](http://www.avery.com), template 5963 - use one project for front of tag and one for back; print on card stock

## Ready to bloom gardens

- Containers - we promote them as being reusable as a vase or for other plants (ferns, succulents)
  - Source: Accent Decor, local wholesaler
  - No holes — be sure to use a sprinkle of Activated Charcoal (from aquarium section of pet store) to eliminate odors
  - Damp ProMix
  - Transplant already growing/budded amaryllis (keeping half of bulb above soil level)
  - Moss - source: local wholesaler
    - Reindeer
    - Spanish
    - Living clump moss
- Trim with branch of Nandina berries or magnolia, double-faced satin ribbon
- Don't forget to include your growing/reblooming advice, variety tag

## Paperwhites

My variety of choice: 'Nir' (also called 'Nasareth')

- Softer fragrance, larger flowers, naturally shorter stems
- Take a bit longer to force (about 5 weeks) than the commonly available 'Ziva'
- 'Inbal' is great too, but doesn't force well in water

Again, size matters — 19+ cm is largest size commercially available and very hard to get

We sell as

- Bulb alone — \$1.50
- 6-pack of bulbs showing buds — \$18 or by the flat (6 x \$18)
  - I start in cooler or under greenhouse benches to build roots, then on to top of greenhouse benches — keep cool and in bright light (under shop lights works great too)
- Ready-to-bloom table top bulb gardens — \$85-\$165 (can also combine with amaryllis)

Containers - same as for amaryllis

Source the largest deep 6-packs you can find. Bulb sits on top of soil, you'll need room for the roots.

How to get shorter stems: Vodka! When stems are about 2" tall, water every time with vodka mixture - 1 pt. vodka to 7 pts. water.

Create tags and growing advice (we don't recommend saving bulbs to rebloom).

## Spring bulbs

Favorite bulb options

- Similar bloom time (April to April-May) so they take the same amount of time to force

- Multi-stem varieties or double blooms
- Fragrance, fragrance, fragrance!

#### How we sell:

- 2019 goal: Spring Bulb Garden Forcing Kits as Christmas gifts for gardeners with our growing advice
- Three Toads Farm Spring Bulb Gardens workshop — \$135, guests get “first dibs” on our Spring bulbs
- Bluegrass Trust Antiques & Garden Show - first weekend in March
  - 6-packs and flats of bulbs
  - Ready-to-bloom table top bulb gardens — \$25 — \$165
- People call and order as gifts, parties or just because when they see our social media posts
- Next to try: pop-up Spring Flower Bar (like a flower bar) ???

#### How to force:

- Mimic fall/winter/spring in a more compressed timeline
- 6-packs - 1 bulb per cell except 2 bulbs/cell for grape hyacinths in Promix
- Bulbs need dark cooling/cold period (fall, winter) followed by cool/light period (spring)

### How we promote our workshop, bulb availability and demonstrations



[www.threetoadsfarm.com](http://www.threetoadsfarm.com) — descriptions, register and pay for workshops

Social media posts — we create using either our photos or an image created using Paperless Post



### To learn more about forcing bulbs

- *Smith & Hawken Forcing, etc.: The indoor gardener’s guide to bringing bulbs, branches & houseplants into bloom, by Katherine Whiteside*
- *The Indoor Potted Bulb: Decorative container gardening with flowering bulbs, by Rob Proctor*
- *Amaryllis, by Starr Ockenga*
- *Holland Bulb Forcer’s Guide, by Dr. August De Hertogh*

### Stay in touch!

- [vschirmer3@gmail.com](mailto:vschirmer3@gmail.com)
- 859.229.9450
- [www.threetoadsfarm.com](http://www.threetoadsfarm.com)
- IG: threetoadsfarm and val\_schirmer
- FB: threetoadsfarm and Valerie Schirmer