Homes & Gardens

Town Tribune Weekly Guide To Fall Living

Why Are Gardeners Putting Flower Bulbs in the Fridge?



Love daffodils, hyacinths, and other spring-flowering bulbs, but don't want to wait until spring to enjoy them? You may not have to.

In this guide, plant pros share their best tips on how to use your fridge to trick flower bulbs into blooming earlier and how to enjoy better blooms indoors and out.

Why People Put Their Flower Bulbs in the Fridge:

Most common flower bulbs require a chilling period to bloom and just won't flower well without it.

Normally, bulbs are exposed to this necessary cold period outdoors when they rest in a state of dormancy through winter. But many bulbs can be forced into blooming inside in any season if you chill them before planting.

You can place bulbs in a paper or mesh bag in your fridge for a few weeks and then plant them in pots with soil or in a vase filled with pebbles and water. Or you can plant the bulbs in a pot and chill the entire setup—pot and all.

Exactly how long specific bulbs need to be chilled varies from plant species to plant species, but most flower bulbs should bloom about 2 to 4 weeks after they're removed from a cold fridge and allowed to warm up at room temperature in a sunny location.

How to Know If You Need to Chill Your Bulbs:

Any bulb that would naturally spend the winter outdoors in a cool location requires a chilling period and can be forced to bloom indoors. However, as Ken Johnson of the University of Illinois explains, some bulbs are particularly well-suited to this process.

"Some [bulbs] are easier to force indoors than others," he says. "This includes tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, grape hyacinths, and crocuses."

Depending on your goals, you can chill bulbs in your fridge in any season, or you can chill them in winter only by placing the bulbs in a cool garage or basement that stays between 20 and 40°F for the recommended number of weeks.

"Just count back the recommended chilling period and the time it takes bulbs to bloom from when you want your bulbs to flower to determine when you should start chilling them," Johnson says. "For example, if you want flowers for Valentine's Day, start chilling the bulbs by mid-October."

Once the chilling period is through, just remove the bulbs to a warm and brightly lit location, plant them in soil or display them in a vase with water, and keep them well-watered until the blooms fade.

Most forced bulbs don't bloom well again, so most growers typically compost them after flowering.

6 Other Plants That Benefit from Cold Stratification:

Spring bulbs aren't the only plants that need to be chilled for optimal blooming. Here are a few other common plants that benefit from cold stratification and should be chilled if you want to start them from seed this spring.

Milkweed:

Milkweed varieties that are native to cold areas, like common milkweed, butterfly weed, and poke milkweed all benefit from cold stratification.

For best results, cold stratify milkweed seeds by wrapping them in a damp paper towel and storing them in a resealable plastic bag in your fridge for 3 to 6 weeks before planting.

Alternatively, you can also stratify those seeds naturally by planting them outdoors after the ground freezes in fall.

Lavender:

Many growers start new lavender plants from cuttings as this herb is notoriously difficult to germinate from seed. But lavender seeds sprout much more readily if you keep them cool and moist for about 2 to 4 weeks before you plant them.

Purple Coneflower:

Different varieties of coneflowers require different chilling periods, but purple coneflower sprouts faster if the seeds are chilled for 2 to 4 weeks before planting.

Black-Eyed Susan:

Black-eyed Susan seeds need about 4 weeks of cold exposure for better sprouting. As with coneflowers and milkweed, this can be achieved by chilling the seeds in the fridge or planting them outdoors in fall.

Joe Pye Weed:

Another plant native to cool regions, Joe Pye weed seeds grow faster with at least 4 to 8 weeks of cold exposure.

Lupine:

Some cultivated varieties of lupines don't need cold stratification, but the seeds of many native varieties should be chilled for about 4 weeks before planting. Lupine seeds are quite large with thick seed coats and sprout faster if the coats are scarified before planting as well.

TOWN TRIBUNE'S KITCHEN CORNER

Pumpkin Caramel Monkey Bread

Ingredients:

- 3 (16.3-oz.) cans refrigerated buttermilk biscuits (the non-flaky ones)
- 3/4 cup granulated sugar
- 1 Tbsp. pumpkin pie spice
- 1/2 cup (1 stick) salted butter
- 1 cup packed light brown sugar
- 1/2 cup heavy cream
- 1/2 cup pure pumpkin puree (not pie filling)
- 1 tsp. vanilla extract

Directions:

- Preheat the oven to 350°F.
- Cut each biscuit into quarters.
- In a large zip-top bag, combine the granulated sugar and pumpkin pie spice. Add half the biscuit pieces, seal the bag, and shake well to coat. Place the pieces in an even layer in a 10-cup Bundt pan. Repeat with the remaining biscuit pieces and sugar.
- In a medium saucepan, heat the butter and brown sugar over medium heat until the sugar is mostly melted, 2 to 3 minutes. Whisk in the heavy cream and pumpkin puree. Bring to a simmer and cook, stirring frequently, until well combined and slightly thickened, 3 to 5 minutes. Remove from the heat and whisk in the vanilla. Pour the mixture over the biscuits.
- Place the Bundt pan on a rimmed baking sheet and bake until the bread has puffed up by about 2 inches and is a deep dark brown on top, 45 to 50 minutes. Let the bread cool in the Bundt pan on a wire rack for 15 minutes.
- To unmold the bread, loosen the edges with an offset spatula. Place a dinner plate or serving platter over the top of the Bundt pan. With oven mitts, hold the pan and dinner plate together, then flip over. Carefully lift off the Bundt pan (give it a few taps if the bread doesn't seem to be releasing), allowing the bread to slide out onto the plate.

This Cleaning Habit Could Be Making Your Kitchen Dirtier Every Time You Clean

When you clean your home, you want to work smarter, not harder. Many tips make logical sense: Wipe off your counters before you sweep so you can sweep any crumbs that fell from above, and dust before you vacuum.

Here's another rule of thumb to follow for kitchen cleaning in particular: Don't use the same sponge for every spill.

Why You Shouldn't Use the Same Sponge for Every Spill:

Although it's tempting to want to grab the sponge from the sink to wipe up a spill in the fridge, it's actually a big mistake. Why? There are two main reasons.

Sponges Are Breeding Grounds for Bacteria:

First, even though they might look clean, sponges are often hotbeds for bacteria. Kitchen sponges can be a major growth site for bacteria like Salmonella and E. coli because they're damp, warm, and contain food. They should be replaced once a week.

As such, using the same sponge on different surfaces promotes the spread of any bacteria hiding in your sponge.

Even if you do clean your sponge between each use, chances are, you're not cleaning it effectively. It turns out, dish soap and water aren't enough to sterilize your sponge.

Microwave your sponge, cycle it through the dishwasher, or soak it in a solution of one-quarter to one-half of a teaspoon of concentrated bleach per quart of warm water to properly clean it.

And avoid cross-contamination, especially when cleaning up after raw meat prep.

Using a cellulose sponge to wipe up messes from raw meat can cause harmful cross-contamination. Opt for a paper towel or food-grade sanitizing wipe.

There Are Different Kinds of Sponges:

The second reason you won't want to use the same sponge to clean everything in the kitchen is because sponges aren't one-size-fits-all.

Using an abrasive sponge on your appliances, for example, might remove any painted on lettering or numbers. Using a scrub brush on your glass cooktop will create scratches over time.

Make sure you have the right sponge (and multiple sponges you swap out frequently) for each job.

T. Palmer Septic
A Complete Septic Service
Septic Repair • Pumping
Test Holes & Percs
Septic Inspections
New Installations
Give us a call
Before the leaves begin to fall!
CALL TODAY!
203-746-3637
LICENSED & INSURED • FAMILY OWNED & OPERATED
Celebrating 31 Years!

Little Stevie's
TREE WORK
SPECIALIZING IN
DIFFICULT TAKE DOWNS
85' BUCKET TRUCK
EXCAVATOR & LAND CLEARING
OWNER PRESENT AT EVERY JOB
SR. CITIZEN DISCOUNTS
FULLY LICENSED AND INSURED
203-300-0376

SHOP LOCAL
SHOP. EAT. ENJOY.
Support Local
Small Businesses
Call: (203) 746-4669

WESTCONN Pest Control LLC
Family Owned and Operated
Professional Home & Commercial Pest Management Company
Serving Connecticut & New York
We want to be the only pest control company you'll ever call!
We protect your family and safeguard your home from damaging insects and disease-carrying rodents
Prompt, Reliable & Trustworthy • Exclusion & Repair
Knowledgeable, Professional & Personal Service
WESTCONN is committed to helping families and businesses protect their health, home and property. A permanent solution for a pest free home is our goal. We promise that our plan for you is completely safe for children, pets and the environment, while delivering the highest level of service. -Tom Dommermuth
203.313.8938 • 203.312.0296
CT License #B-2532 • NY License #15724 • State Certified & Insured