

# Growing Flowers

If you're like lots of us, you've secretly decided that your green thumb is anything but. Seeds seem to rot, sprouts seem to wither, and you're about ready to give up.

Parents, take heart! This winter garden project is just about bomb-proof, and believe it or not, it might even make a great gift.

## What You Need:

- 2-3 paperwhite narcissus bulbs (available at nurseries and some hardware stores)
- clean sand or small decorative pebbles
- ceramic pot or dish: about 6" in diameter, at least 4" deep, with no hole in the bottom

## What You Do:

1. Start by showing your child the paperwhite narcissus bulbs. Your child will notice that they look pretty plain, sort of like onions. Explain that "bulbs" are like a "super seed" for certain kinds of flowers: inside the plain brown exterior is all the nutrition that these flowers need in order to sprout and flourish.
2. Your bulbs will need some help, though, and here's your job. Start by putting about an inch of sand or pebbles in the bottom of the ceramic pot or dish you've chosen. Then place the three bulbs, root side down, on top of the sand or pebbles. (The root side is usually rounded, with small white or brown rootlets; on the sprout side, you can usually see a small green shoot starting). Cover the rest of the bulb with sand or pebbles, leaving the tip of the sprout exposed.
3. Now fill your pot or dish with water, making sure that it covers the sand or pebbles completely. Put it in a sunny window, and check every few days to make sure that there's still plenty of water.
4. Depending on the climate in your area, paperwhites take between 3-4 weeks to bloom. First, they'll send up sturdy shoots, then leaves; then each flower stalk becomes a small bouquet of fragrant white flowers. They are a holiday gift that's universally appealing: for Christmas, you can wrap them in green and red tissue; for Hanukkah, they are smashing when wrapped in blue. And Kwanzaa's red, green, and yellow color wrappings make the flowers especially festive. As an added bonus, this is a "green" gift. The flowers continue to bloom for two weeks or so, and then when they're spent, you can plant them outside, where the soil will help them replenish their nutrients, and they can bloom each spring for years to come.

