

Yes, you can grow fragrant paperwhites indoors during January. Plant the bulbs in a shallow container and give them water, light, and a cool spot, and they can bloom indoors without a period of cold storage.

## Why paperwhites grow well indoors

Paperwhites are a type of narcissus grown from bulbs. Unlike many other spring flowering bulbs, they do not need a long chilling period before they will grow and bloom. That makes them suitable for starting indoors in the middle of winter.

The bulbs carry much of the stored energy they need for their first round of growth. Water encourages roots to form, while light helps the emerging leaves and stems develop. Their white flowers have a noticeable scent, although people differ in how much they enjoy it.

## How to start the bulbs

Choose firm paperwhite bulbs and a shallow, watertight container. Pebbles hold the bulbs steady while leaving room for roots to reach the water.

1. Put a layer of clean pebbles in the bottom of the container.
2. Set the bulbs on the pebbles with their pointed ends facing up. Place them close together, but leave enough room for each bulb to sit upright.
3. Add more pebbles around the lower parts of the bulbs to keep them in place. Leave the tops exposed.
4. Pour in water until it just reaches the base of the bulbs. Keep the water at about that level as roots develop.
5. Place the container in a cool spot. Once shoots appear, move it to a bright location out of harsh direct sun.

Check the water often. Roots need access to moisture, but keeping the whole bulb submerged can encourage rot.

## Give the stems light and support

A bright window helps the stems grow more evenly. Turn the container every few days if the shoots lean toward the glass. A cool room is useful too, since warm conditions can encourage tall, floppy growth and shorten the life of the flowers.

If the stems begin to bend, place a few slim stakes among the pebbles and tie the stems loosely with soft string. You can also use a tall, clear vase for support, provided there is room to check the water.

## Plan for flowers and fragrance

Paperwhites often bloom about three to six weeks after planting, though timing varies with growing conditions. Bulbs started in January may flower later that month or in February. For flowers early in January, start the bulbs several weeks beforehand.

Once the flowers open, move the container away from heaters and strong sun to help the blooms last. Their scent can be strong in a small room, so choose a position where you find it pleasant. Keep bulbs and plants away from pets and children because narcissus is toxic if eaten.

## Questions about January paperwhites

### Can paperwhites grow in soil instead of pebbles?

Yes. Plant the bulbs in potting mix with their pointed tips above the surface, and keep the soil lightly moist rather than waterlogged.

### Will the bulbs bloom again next year?

Paperwhites forced indoors are unlikely to bloom well again indoors because the first flowering uses much of their stored energy. Many growers replace them after flowering.

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