

**Yes, There is More Than One Kind of Paperwhite
or
Your Paperwhites Don't Have to Tip Over This Christmas**

By Diane Peel, Master Gardner

For an unusual holiday decoration or gift consider growing paperwhites. They look so festive, so elegant yet they are fast and easy to grow. They don't need any cold at all to bloom, and you can grow them in water. You can start them at Thanksgiving and have them blooming or ready to bloom by Christmas. Anybody can do it. Until they get too tall and tip over.

Nothing works quite right to either fix this top heaviness. Staking in the pebbles or marbles you are using is impossible, using a vase just shorter than the flowers looks odd, and does not keep the flower stalk from tilting. Halo stakes are available, but only work with a single bulb grown in a special vase. This last solution is costly, while preventing the rich look of 3, 6, or more bulbs blooming together.

Paperwhites are so fragrant; a few can perfume a whole room. Just add a few more add a few more, and the smell can be overwhelming particularly in a small room. Some people don't like the smell at any strength.

Changing the paperwhite variety you use could help you solve both problems. 'Ziva' is the most commonly available bulb and what most people think of as paperwhite. But of the five Narcissus (see box below) generally accepted as paperwhites, Inball is both the second most easily found (even locally), has both a lighter, less musky smell, plus it is several inches shorter than Ziva. Since it isn't so top heavy, it doesn't topple, lean or fall over. And since the smell is lighter and less musky few people find it objectionable.

	Ziva	Nir	Inball	Ariel	Wintersun
Avg weeks to bloom	3-4	3-4	4-5	3-5	3-4
Avg. Flower Stems per Bulb	1.5 - 2	2.5 - 3	2	2 - 3	2 - 3
Avg. Flower Size	Industry Std: 2-2.5"	10% larger than Ziva	10% larger than Ziva	10% larger than Ziva	Industry Std: □2-2.5"
Fragrance	classic: strong and musky	classic: strong and musky	lighter and less musky	classic: strong□and musky	lighter and less musky
Avg. Height	15-16" in full sun, taller in low light	14-16" in full sun, taller in low light	12-13" in full sun, taller in low light	14-15" in full sun, taller in low light	16-17" in full sun, taller in low light
Cultivar Notes	Our stock is a new genetically improved bloodline	Fast to flower with high bud/bloom count	Shortest variety with lighter scent	More compact with strong stems and high bud/bloom	New variety - flowers have bright yellow cups

<http://www.easytogrowbulbs.com/index.asp?PageAction=Custom&ID=169>

There are two other readily available narcissus, that act like paperwhites-except they are not solely white, or not white at all.. The Chinese Sacred Lily is yellow and white, Sol 'dOr is two tones of yellow. Erlicheer (aka and pronounced Early Cheer) is a double with a sweet smell, forces as easily as the others; but each bloom is sumptuous enough to go solo.

Still, Ziva is generally THE paperwhite: it's probably the bulb and the scent you are familiar with, and if close enough to Christmas, it may be the only one you can easily find. But what to do about the top heaviness?

The Flowerbulb Research Program at Cornell University discovered another way to keep paperwhites from growing too tall and 'flopping.' Plant the bulbs as usual in gravel, pretty stones or marbles, then add water as you usually would. (Remember, water should be just UNDER the bulbs) and wait about a week until roots appear and the shoot is about 1-2 inches long and green. Then pour off the water and replace it with a solution of 4-6% alcohol made from any hard liquor (not wine: it has sugar in it) or even rubbing alcohol.

Use this solution instead of water, to "water" your bulbs-to keep the water level where it should be, right under the bulbs. The result will be a plant that is 1/3 shorter than it would have been given the usual water. It won't be top heavy, but will still look and smell the same-it will even last as long. To figure out how to get the right percent of alcohol in the solution, follow this link: http://gardening.about.com/od/forcingandprechilling/qt/PaperWhites_Alc.htm



Photo courtesy of Cornell University Chronicle online.

<http://www.news.cornell.edu/stories/March06/drunkenflowers.ssl.html>

