

Pickling Paperwhites



It's that time of year!

Thousands of flower-bulb lovers will 'force' paperwhites inside so they can enjoy their blooms during the darkest days of the year. And thanks to an undergrad research project, many of those bulb-forcers won't have to stake, tie, or otherwise support the usually floppy paperwhites.

With the help of one of his horticulture students, Erin Finan, Dr. Miller started running experiments. In brief, what they discovered is that stems will end up roughly a third shorter than normal if you take the following steps.

"Start your bulbs in plain water. When roots have formed and the green shoot is 1 to 2 inches long, pour off the water and replace with a solution of 4 to 6 percent alcohol. If you are using 80 proof liquor (40 percent alcohol), that works out to one-part gin (or the like) to 7 parts water."

"Rubbing alcohol (either 70 or 100 percent isopropyl alcohol) can be substituted; just remember to dilute it more. Keep the beer and wine for yourself; their sugars damage plants."