Sky offers many bulbs suitable for forcing. In general, forcing bulbs is a 2-phase process. In Phase I, you simulate “winter” for the bulb by providing a specific period of cold and dark. In Phase II, you bring the bulbs to a more spring-like environment to stimulate flowering.

Phase I is a time of cool darkness when roots are developed. Hardy bulbs, such as hyacinths and tulips, need to receive a winter’s worth of cool to cold (30° - 40° F) temperatures. Most hardy bulbs generally need about 12 weeks of this treatment, which means starting the process in October for January or February bloom. By the end of this period, roots should be visible through the container drainage hole. Bulbs native to warmer climates such as amaryllis, freesias, and paperwhites, don’t need or want any actual chilling, and have generally a shorter Phase I period.

If you take the plants out of Phase I prematurely, before the roots have developed adequately, the immature root system may not be developed enough to support the stem and flower growth. Although top growth may appear, it frequently topples over before the flowers open.

Phase II begins after the cooling process. At this point, you duplicate spring by bringing the pots into progressively warmer temperatures (up to 60° - 65° F) and into bright light. The Phase II conditions coax the stems and flowers to emerge from the bulbs.

No chilling needed:
Amaryllis
Freesia
Paperwhite Narcissus

Chilling Needed:
Crocus
Daffodils/Narcissus (except Paperwhites)
Grape Hyacinths
Hyacinths
Miniature Iris
Tulips
FORCING FREESIAS

Unlike most other bulbs which already contain dormant flower bulbs, freesias form their flower buds as they grow. Freesias requirements for forcing are a bit different than the other bulbs being discussed.

Plant freesias in well-drained soil. Fill the pot to within two inches of the rim and then set the corms two inches apart with their tips pointing up. Cover the corms with an inch of soil and water well.

Phase I (55º for about 45 days)

The pots may be set in a darkened area for up to 45 days. Water only if the soil dries below the soil surface.

Phase II (65º - 70º, bright light)

Once tips emerge from the soil, bring the pots into a very brightly lit area. Freesias will need maximum light to manufacture enough food to develop their flowers. It will take up to three months for the freesias to develop flower stalks and begin blooming.

FORCING HYACINTHS

Phase I (35º - 45º for 8-12 weeks)

There are two methods of planting hyacinths.

1. Planting in soil. Plant with tips of the bulbs even with the top edge of the pot. The soil level should be about ¾” from the rim. Bulbs forced in soil will have a deeper blossom color than those forced in water.

2. Potted in water. Use a hyacinth vase to help support the bulb just above the water level. Add enough water so the bulb’s base is barely touching the water. Check the water level frequently. A bit of charcoal in the water will help keep it clear. Give water-grown hyacinths a slow, cool start, about 40º-50º is great. Keep them in a dark location until the roots develop and fill the vase, usually 13 weeks.

Phase II (4 weeks, bright light)

Once the hyacinth has 2-3” of shoots growing, place the hyacinth in a warmer location which has a lot of bright light.
FORCING CROCUS

Perhaps the easiest and the quickest outdoor/hardy bulbs to force are the crocus.

Phase I (35º-45º for 7-12 weeks)

Plant crocus in a shallow pot with the bulbs’ noses just at the soil surface. For fun, try a crocus pot which has holes around the sides for the flowers to emerge through.

Phase II (60º for 2 weeks)

Crocus flower buds develop quickly when the pots are brought into light. After flowering, plant outside for enjoyment as a garden bulb in the future.

FORCING NARCISSUS & DAFFODILS (OTHER THAN PAPERWHITES)

Planted in mid-October, narcissus and daffodils will bloom in January or February.

Phase I (10 weeks)

Plant 5 to 6 bulbs in a 6” or 7” pot. Allow 10 weeks or more for the Phase I root development.

Phase II (55º-60º)

When the leaves are about 3” tall and buds are visible, move the containers to a cool, brightly lit area. The cooler the temperature, the longer the flowers will last. Small rock garden narcissus are especially pretty in a container. After flowers fade and the foliage withers, bulbs may be stored for later planting in the garden.

FORCING TULIPS

Planted in mid-October, tulip bulbs will bloom in January or may be slowed to bloom near Valentine’s Day.

Phase I (10-12 weeks)

Fill pots to within 3” of the rim with well-drained potting soil. Place bulbs with the flat sides facing outward and the tips up. Leave ½” to 1” space between bulbs. Add more soil around the bulbs, firm and water well. The bulb tops should just barely be covered. Plant 5 to 6 bulbs in a 6” or 7” pot.

Phase II (slightly warmer)

When the plants are about 4” tall and the buds are visible, move them into a slightly warmer, light room. Tulips may be sped up by bringing them to room temperature or slowed down by keeping them cool. After flowers fade and the foliage withers, bulbs may be stored for later planting in the garden.