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From Paperwhites to Paper Bush

by Lydia Holley

If you are looking to grow something easy and common, try paperwhite narcissus (*Narcissus papyraceus*). Paperwhite narcissus are lovely indoors and out. They are one of the easiest bulbs to force, as they do not require a chilling period.



Simply plant your bulbs in moist soil and place in bright light. Keep the soil moist, but not wet, and they should bloom in four to six weeks. If you prefer, you can grow paperwhites soilless. Just add the bulbs to a pebble base. Add water, but keep the water level to just underneath the bulb. Again, you do not want the bulbs to rot. If grown indoors, your paperwhites may need support, so be prepared to tie twine or ribbon around them, support them with colorful stems from your garden, or place them in a tall container.

You can also easily grow paperwhite narcissus outdoors in East Texas. They will bloom from late autumn through early spring, depending upon the variety and the cold fronts that move through. Place them in well draining soil in full or part sun. They make wonderful companions to other winter blooming plants, and may multiply freely. Place them around a birdbath, or a tree with beautiful winter bark. Be certain to plant some where you can see them from indoors. If they become crowded, lift and divide the bulbs in summer or early autumn.

If you are a plant collector and are looking for something a little more challenging and much more unusual, you may want to give the paper bush (*Edgeworthia chrysantha*) a try. It needs to be planted in a rich, moist soil in part shade. Related to the Daphne, these plants do not like to be transplanted, so choose your site carefully before acquiring one.

Paper bush plants have big, beautiful leaves in summer, which they shed in winter. That is when you can see the unusual blooms that hang on their stems like Christmas ornaments. It is exciting to see the buds beginning to form in autumn, and to watch the buds as they swell and finally bloom.

Paper bush plants are not easy to find for purchase. They are also not usually seen planted in commercial gardens, although they seem to be becoming more popular in private gardens as collectors learn of this unusual plant. I have had mine in my garden for several years. It has grown slowly, as it is just now beginning to branch out and become a true bush. Although mine is currently only three feet tall, I expect it to grow to a mature size of six feet tall and six feet wide.

From paperwhites to paper bush plants, it is easy to see that there is something for every garden, every season, and every gardener, from novice to collector.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.