

Keeping Paper White Narcissus from Flopping

Paper white narcissus are popular bulbs for forcing indoors. The fragrant white flowers are hopeful signs of spring. However, the tall flower stalks and leaves flop over easily, and even though they can be propped up with sticks and plants ties, their excessive height can be a nuisance.

Researchers at Cornell University have found a way to keep paper whites within bounds. They forced the bulbs in pots filled with gravel and a 4 to 6 percent alcohol solution made by mixing 7 parts water with 1 part 80-proof alcohol such as gin, vodka, tequila, or rum (not beer or wine). It does not matter which type of liquor you use, as long as the concentration of alcohol is the same. Continue adding this solution as needed while the bulbs grow.

The result is a perfectly normal narcissus plant and flower that grows only 1/3 to 1/2 the normal height. The flowers are just as large and long lasting. It is important to use the exact amount of alcohol because in a 10 percent solution, the plants grow and flower poorly.

For more information, click on www.flowerbulbs.cornell.edu/