



BULBS ARE SIMPLE TO GROW

Spring-flowering bulbs are simple to grow as long as a few basics are kept in mind. Flowering and longevity are best when bulbs are planted in garden locations that remain dry during the summer. Wet soils cause bulbs to deteriorate, so avoid planting bulbs in swales, near downspouts, or among perennials that require frequent summer irrigation.

Many residential landscapes have areas of dense shade -- difficult places to site summer-flowering plants. Bulbs are an exception: since they grow and flower before trees and shrubs leaf out, bulbs are ideal candidates for planting in these spots. Because the dormant period of bulbs is summer, interplanting bulbs with herbaceous perennials extends the blooming interest in flower borders. Daylilies are especially good companions for bulbs: their mounds of similar foliage conceal the declining leaves of spring bulbs.

Resist the urge to cut back the declining foliage. An important rule of bulb cultivation is this: to achieve a strong bloom show in subsequent years, leave bulb foliage in place until it yellows.

As with all plants, bulbs are dependent on their leaves to produce food for growth. Our spring favorites are unique in their ability to create a storehouse of nutrients in the form of a bulb, but they need their leaves to do this. When the leaves yellow, they have served their purpose and can be removed.

Bulbs are beautiful interplanted in groundcover masses of *Vinca* (P periwinkle), *Pachysandra* (Japanese spurge), or creeping junipers. "Bouquet" plantings -- groups of 8-12 closely planted, large-flowering varieties such as tulips and daffodils -- are especially effective used this way. Or make your lawn lovelier by planting drifts of *crocus*, *Scilla* (squill), and *Galanthus* (snowdrops). These earliest of bloomers have grass-like foliage and naturalize exceptionally well.



Crocus bloom very early in spring.

You can also plant bulbs along with early-flowering perennial plants. Some good partners

include: forget-me-not (*Brunnera* or *Myosotis*), bluebells (*Mertensia*), perennial alyssum (*Aurinia*), Lenten rose (*Helleborus*), pasque flower (*Anemone pulsatilla*), and English daisy (*Bellis perennis*). Ornamental grasses may offer little spring interest, but they do a fine job of concealing fading bulb foliage, and their summer irrigation needs are minimal.

Daffodils have the distinction of being the most reliably perennial of large-flowering bulbs. They are pest-proof, deer-proof, and multiply for years without dividing. They naturalize in woodlands, but avoid planting under spruces and other evergreens. Daffodils are available in a broad spectrum of color and form. The Jonquil group is the most fragrant members of the family. 'Pipit' and 'Suzy' are two varieties that combine fabulous fragrance with multi-flowering form in shades of butter, lemon, and orange.



The Triandrus group exhibits a fruity fragrance, and the nodding, multi-flowering form of pristine 'Thalia' is a standout. Small-cupped varieties like the classic 'Actaea' provide abundant bloom, striking color, and unforgettable aroma.



Tulip bulbs have always been held in high esteem -- at one point in European history, they were used as currency. While their persistence in the landscape is less dependable than that of the agreeable daffodil, tulips expand the color palette in the spring landscape. They are a valuable source of spring-flowering color, from pale pastels to dramatic deep tones. By mixing tulip types from the front to the back of the border, a gardener can guarantee blooms for an extraordinary length of time.

If multi-year longevity is desired, choose tulips from the Fostering (Emperor) group, the Darwin group (especially 'Apeldoorn'

and its cousins), and the many dwarf species--'Tarda', 'Lilac Beauty', and 'Bright Gem' are tiny tulips with a big impact. Most tulips have a sweetly subtle scent, but the orange and purple 'Princess Irene' embraces gardeners with her heady fragrance.

Tulips, too, are dependent on their foliage after flowers have faded, and their nutritional needs also include a top-dressing with bulb fertilizer in fall. If a well-established bed of daffodils is not blooming well, treat it to the same menu.

Although wet soils are a recipe for disaster with many bulbs, these varieties have shown relatively good tolerance to moist

conditions: Camassia; Cyclamineus group of daffodils ('Jetfire', 'February Gold', 'Jack Snipe', and 'Peeping Tom'); Leucojum; and snowdrops (Galanthus).

If animal pests, such as squirrels, mice, or voles that eat the bulbs are a problem, physical barriers are an option. Try lining holes for plantings with hardware cloth to envelope the bulbs. Come spring, tender sprouts can be protected from deer and rabbits with an animal repellent or a sprinkling of hot Thai pepper oil, available in the ethnic food aisle of many supermarkets. Remember, too, that daffodils are not bothered by animal pests.

So armed with the facts of bulb cultivation, plan to add bulbs to your landscape. A sunny fall day is all that's needed now for a pleasant gardening experience - planting bulbs for a glorious spring show.