

From:



All About Bulbs

© Copyright 2006 Gardening-Guides.com

Selecting Bulbs

Ahhhh spring! The bright colors of crocus, tulips, daffodils and narcissus; you know the new season has started and winter is over!

Spring would not be spring without bulb flower gardening. The vibrant colors of an early spring bulb garden just can't be duplicated. Easy to plant and with little maintenance after planting, bulb flower gardening continues to be a favorite worldwide pastime.

After a cold, gray winter, a spring flower garden works magic on your well-being. Easy to grow, bulbs bloom reliably season after season. With just a little work, bulb flower gardening returns your efforts with an array of diverse and colorful blooms.

Bulb Plants Are Self Contained

Bulb plants are very easy to grow both in the garden and in containers. Because they are so easy to grow, planting bulbs is an excellent way to introduce children to gardening.

The bulb is actually a tiny womb for a flower. In fact, if you split a bulb in half, you probably will see the bud and in some cases, the beginnings of the flower. Everything the flower needs to grow, except water, is contained inside a bulb. All of the nutrients and vitamins are self-contained to ensure successful bloom.

Although the differences between them are slight, many of these flower storehouses that we commonly call bulbs are actually rhizomes, corms and tubers. Look for these labels in addition to "bulbs" when purchasing bulbs.

When selecting bulbs, always choose those that are firm and blemish-free. A good rule of thumb to remember is "the larger the bulb, the larger the bloom."

Selecting Healthy Bulbs

Think about when you want color in your bulb flower gardening site. There is an excellent color choice available in tulip bulbs. No matter what type of color design you want to create your choices range from white to pink to even black tulips. Daffodils, although typically sunny yellow, are also found in combinations of yellow and white. Crocuses are commonly white, purple or yellow.

There is no need to stick to only one type of bulb, as spring bulbs all complement each other very well. Tulips pair very nicely with daffodils and crocuses are a small plant that add color to the lower end of the garden.

You can extend blooming times by planting different varieties of bulbs also extends bloom times. Bulb varieties exist for every bulb flower gardening season:

- Some of the most popular early spring bulbs are tulips, crocuses and daffodils.
- Snowdrops and winter aconite also bloom in early spring
- Grape hyacinth and Grecian windflowers are mid-spring bloomers.
- Lilies and Persian buttercups blossom in early to mid-summer.
- Amaryllis does its thing in late summer
- Begonias, dahlias, eucomis, elephant ears and caladiums are also popular summer bulbs.
- Meadow saffron shows off in the autumn.

Choosing the right bulbs involves more than just selecting colors and cultivars. Type, timing, bulb size, and most importantly, bulb health are equally significant factors in designing your spring garden.

“Bulb” Types

Along with true bulbs, several types of flowers, sold as bulbs, grow from the underground stem growth of *rhizomes*, *tubers*, and *corms*.

- True bulbs are rounded, self-sufficient, underground storage organs. True bulbs are an incubator for a flower bud embryo already inside.
- Many perennial flowers grow from tubers, which are flat underground stems that store food and plant energy.
- Corms are thick underground stems that produce the new roots, leaves and flowers of their cultivars.
- Rhizomes are modified plant stems that grow horizontally under the surface of the soil. New growth emerges from several different points along each rhizome.

Bulb Health

The first part in selecting healthy bulbs is knowing the bulb parts.

1. The tunic of a bulb is the paper-like outside of the bulb that protects it from damage and keeps it from drying out.
2. The scale leaves are under the tunic and hold all the nutrients needed to grow the cultivar.
3. The first parts of the plant to push through the soil are the immature leaves, closely followed (or so we hope) by the flower bud and the stem.
4. The roots of bulb cultivars grow from the basal plate, which lies at the bottom of each bulb.

When selecting bulbs for bulb flower gardening, the bigger the better. Large bulbs ensure big, healthy blooms.

Healthy bulbs are firm, well rounded, and heavy for their size. Although bulbs come in a range of colors, some even with distinctive patterns, color should be uniform with no dark patches or light splotches. Look for firmness and avoid any with soft spots or other signs of damage. Don't buy bulbs that are cracked or deeply scratched. Discard any bulbs with weak spots or spongy areas, which are signs of rot caused by disease or other damage.

Keep them in a cool, dry area away from sunlight until you're ready to plant.

Bulb Size

“The bigger the bulb, the bigger the bloom” is a double-edged tip for selecting bulbs.

First, it helps you select cultivars and decide where to place them in your spring flower garden. For instance, crocus and anemone bulbs are tiny imps that beg a front row or outside border seat, while giant tulip or daffodil bulbs stand tall in back rows or keep watch over the center of your garden.

Second, larger bulbs, within a particular cultivar, are generally more robust than smaller bulbs and produce stronger, healthier plants and blooms.

Timing

When choosing bulbs for a spring flower garden, consider both when they need to be planted as well as when you want them to appear.

Most spring bulbs need to be planted in late summer or autumn. However, the reasons for the timing in planting spring bulbs usually aren't relative to when the bulbs sprout in the spring. Rather, bulbs usually need to be planted when it is cool enough to keep them from sprouting, but warm enough to allow roots to become established before winter.

All spring bulbs need a cool weather rest period below 50°F in order to sprout successfully. If your climate is warm, you'll need to provide them with a simulated winter before planting them.

- Tulips — 14 weeks

- Hyacinths — 12 weeks
- Snowdrops and scilla — 6 weeks
- Crocus — 4 weeks

Although crocuses and windflowers are tiny, they are brave little imps and often the first heralds of spring. Generally, they'll be followed by smaller tulip cultivars and narcissus. Still, even some of the larger daffodils and giant tulip hybrids may surprise you with an early appearance. The best way to try to synchronize bulb growth with your garden plan is to check the growth patterns of each individual cultivar before purchasing and planting the bulbs.

Start Your Spring Flowering Bulbs in the Fall

In the fall as your garden begins to wind down for the year, it's always fun to do a little bit more planting before the first snowfall. One of the nice things about spring bulbs is that you buy and plant spring flowering bulbs at the end of the summer growing season.

Because they are self-contained, bulbs can live in several different types of soil. The most important caveat for bulbs is to be sure that you plant them in an area with good drainage. Although bulbs need water, those planted in poorly drained soil will rot before they get the chance to bloom.

A common question that many first-time bulb growers ask is, "Which end goes up?"

You may be unfamiliar with flower bulbs, but you probably have seen onions and fresh garlic, which are also bulb plants. The tops of flower bulbs are often pointed, but even if they are rounded, dry root growth at the bottom of the bulb looks the same as the roots of your vegetable bulbs. You, of course, plant your bulbs root side down!



Begin planting spring flowering bulbs shortly after you purchase them in September or early October, approximately six weeks before the ground freezes. Plant bulbs in well-prepared soil in depths according to bulb size.

The rule of thumb for planting bulbs is to plant them two and a half times deeper than they are around. Typically this means, if you have large bulbs, you should be planting them 6 to 7 1/2" deep. Plant small bulbs approximately 2 to 2 1/2" deep.

Bulb planters come in handy for planting bulbs to cover large areas. To produce a clumping effect in a small area, dig a wide, deep hole and plant up to ten bulbs together, just being sure that they don't touch each other. Cover the bulbs with soil, water deeply, and you're on your way to reveal the surprises of your first spring flowering bulb garden!

Fall Flowering Bulbs

Deciduous trees dazzle us with the brilliance of the golds, oranges and reds they display before dropping their leaves in the autumn. However, you don't have to be satisfied with autumn leaf color alone. Consider planting fall flowering bulbs.

Spring-flowering bulbs are universal symbols of spring. Many of us wait to see the cheerful little crocus as it pops through the last of the winter snows. The delicate narcissus, the colorful tulip, and the sunny daffodil are all spring flowering bulbs that bring out smiles after long, colorless winters. Just as spring-flowering bulbs bring a welcome burst of color as they usher in the season, fall flower bulbs offer you a last blast of vibrancy to keep in memory through a long, colorless winter.

There are two main differences between spring flowering bulbs and fall flowering bulbs. Spring flowering bulbs are planted in the fall and need a cold period of winter dormancy to flower. Fall flowering bulbs are typically planted in the spring or summer. Most fall flowering bulbs aren't winter hardy and need to be lifted in late autumn and stored until time for the next spring planting.

The dahlia, which grows from a tuber, is a beautiful late-summer flower that blooms until the first frost. Blooms can range from button to dinner-plate size in virtually every color except solid blue. As all fall flower bulbs, dahlias are easy to plant and easy to care for, requiring only that you lift them in the fall for winter storage.

Colchicums are perhaps the best known but least planted fall flower bulbs. They are unique in that they only need sunlight to grow and will bloom sitting on your potting bench or even on your kitchen table! Large flowers, resembling the crocus, are typically pink. Although they need soil to make roots and foliage, because the bulb must be planted partly exposed, colchicums are a target for snails and slugs, which will peel the bulbs like an onion.

The saffron crocus is a fall flower bulb that does double duty in your flower garden. Lilac flowers display the burnt orange-red stigmas that are the source of the spice, saffron. The flowers only last for two days. Pick the stigmas on the second day, air dry them and you have just harvested homegrown saffron to season your dishes.

Bulb flower gardening continues to be a great way to incorporate vibrant colors and foliar texture to your lawn or garden. With minimal effort, you can enjoy these gorgeous bloomers from early spring until fall. Once you get started with bulb flower gardening, you'll wonder why you ever waited!

About Us

HDK-BeheerBV company is the parent company of Gardening-Guides.com. Started in 2004, Gardening-Guides.com is the brainchild of webmaster Hans Dekker. It's his vision to offer you a panoramic view of gardening.



In addition to being the trailblazer for Gardening-Guides.com, Hans is also a talented Internet businessman and owner of Net Research, Netherlands. Starting with just a few articles on Holland bulbs and tulips, Hans has not only used his Internet expertise to grow a virtual garden that holds dozens of cultivars, but he has also cultivated a team of talented writers that provides you with ever-fresh news and insights into every type of gardening you can imagine.

The mission of gardening-guides.com is to provide you, the gardener with quality information about year-round gardening, garden related topics and the resources you need to find the plants, tools, and other gardening products you need to grow a successful and satisfying garden.

We hope you enjoyed All About Bulbs and visit us at www.Gardening-Guides.com to read more informative articles about gardening. If you need more information about Gardening Guides, have a question, or concern, please do contact us! We're always happy to talk about gardening.

Gardening-guides.com
HDK Beheer BV
Kantershof 248
1104GM Amsterdam
Netherlands