



## Fall Planted Spring-flowering Bulbs

Spring-flowering bulbs like tulips and daffodils are a welcome sight after months of winter. But in order to enjoy them in the spring, some work needs to take place in the fall season. Traditional cold hardy bulbs like tulips and daffodils need to be planted in fall to experience a chill period of 6-10 weeks in order to bloom successfully the following spring.

The best time to plant bulbs is in the fall when the weather has cooled (*temperatures no longer reach 65° F or higher*) and soil temperatures are starting to cool off as well. If bulbs are planted too early, they may start to sprout in the fall which uses up some of the stored energy that it needs to get through the winter months. Even if this happens, most bulbs will bloom the following spring without harm. There is no exact calendar date to plant, but here in Ohio, October to mid-November is ideal. You can actually plant bulbs into early winter as long as the ground is not frozen.



### Planting Bulbs -

**Which way is up?** When you examine a dormant bulb, it may be difficult to determine which end is the grow tip and which is the root end. Generally speaking, most bulbs have a tip and a wider flat side. The tip points up, while the flat side, which may have some dried roots still attached, goes down. If still in doubt, plant slightly sideways and the bulb's foliage will find its way to the soil surface in spring.

**How deep should bulbs be planted?** As a general rule of thumb, plant bulbs 3x-4x the height of the bulb. As far as spacing bulbs, it depends on the look you are trying to achieve. Dig one large hole and space the bulbs evenly, for a full, dramatic look or dig individual holes in a circle or drift. Bulbs look best in clumps or drifts as opposed to rows like soldiers.

A majority of spring-flowering bulbs prefer **full sun to partial shade**. You may have even more options in the landscape to plant bulbs because most bulbs are done blooming before trees are even leafed out. Shady spots in summer, may be full sun in spring. Average garden soil is fine, just make sure the soil drains well. Too much standing water can rot bulbs.

Bulb packaging will indicate spring bloom time as either **early, mid-spring or late spring**. It is wonderful information to be able to coordinate different bulb varieties to bloom at the same time or stagger a planting to maximize your bulb blooming season.

**Fertilizing** bulbs is not necessary, but if you feel your soil is not adequate, mix in some bone meal, superphosphate or Bulb-tone® with the soil at the bottom of the hole before placing the bulbs. You can also broadcast fertilizer onto the soil surface, gently rake it in, then water thoroughly. Apply a layer of mulch to help retain moisture and prevent weeds from forming.

**What if you are unable to plant bulbs in fall?** Bulbs are a living item but in a dormant state. They need moisture and soil to continue living. If the ground is frozen and you are unable to plant them, you can plant them in pots and store the pots in a cool, but not freezing location. Water the pots sparingly during the winter months. When the ground thaws in spring, remove from the pots and plant them or place the pots on the patio and let them grow there. **Note:** Bloom performance may not be as great as it would be if they were planted in the ground and allowed to grow more naturally.

**What is the best way to deter animals from digging up or eating bulbs?** Deer, rabbits, squirrels, chipmunks and rodents have all been known to eat bulbs or the foliage after they sprout. The best deterrent is to plant bulbs they don't like. Some of them are: Allium, Anemones, Chinodoxa, Daffodils, Fritillaria, Hyacinth, Iris, Muscari Grape Hyacinth, Scilla, and Snowdrops.

You might also try applying repellents or creating barriers. There are several repellents on the market to either soak the bulbs in before planting or spray around the area after planting. It would take more than one application which can be problematic too! Some have had success with the use of blood meal or hot pepper flakes on the soil surface. An alternative is a physical barrier such as making a "bulb cage" out of chicken wire and planting that. The leaves and roots can grow through the wire, but the rodent can't get to the bulbs.

**Can the unsightly foliage be cut back right after the bulbs are done blooming in late spring?** Resist the temptation to cut the foliage all the way to the ground after bulbs are done blooming. The bulbs need time to photosynthesize and absorb nutrients through the foliage in order to create next year's blooms. You can deadhead the seed heads that form after the flowers, but leave the foliage. This will help the bulbs focus on sending its energy back into the bulb and work on producing next year's bloom and foliage. After the bulb foliage has yellowed or dried up, you can trim back or pull it away. Plant neighboring annuals or perennials to help camouflage the dying foliage and provide continuous color through the summer.

**How and when should bulbs be divided?** If bulbs appear crowded and flowering has diminished, you can dig them up after flowering is finished and the foliage has yellowed or dried up. Bulbs are entering their dormant season in early summer, so it is safest to dig and divide then. Daffodils are tough and tend to go on flowering great for several years without any intervention. Tulips on the other hand will decline in flowering and may benefit from being dug up and separate the offsets from the mother bulb. Start by digging several inches away from the edge of the bulb area, so you don't end up cutting into the bulbs and damaging them. The small offsets may take several seasons to reach the size to produce a flower, but the wait is worth the beautiful blooms.