



Bulb Selection and Planting

Soil Preparation

Bulbs require well-drained soil. Many times gardeners feel that if their bulbs don't appear in the spring it's because of animal damage. This may be the case but often bulbs will rot over winter in a heavy soil. If you have good black dirt, soak the soil 2 to 3 days before planting to make it easier to work. While soil is moist but not wet, turn it and break up any clods. If your soil is clay, work into the whole area where the bulbs are to be planted lots of organic matter; composted leaves, mushroom compost, sphagnum peat moss are some examples.

Planting methods

If you have prepared your bed properly you can use a trowel or bulb-planting tool to dig individual holes for your bulbs. Try to avoid straight lines. Plants in a natural setting do not grow in straight lines. So avoid the "soldiers in a row" look and be a little random in your planting.

Another method of planting is to remove the soil to an even depth. This makes it easy to get the bulbs at the right depth and evenly spaced.

Fertilizing

Bone meal or superphosphate are very important for bulb development. They are not very soluble so they are best when mixed in the soil during bed preparation or applied at root level when the bulbs are planted. These sources of phosphorus are not the only nutrients a bulb needs. A complete fertilizer (containing nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium) such as Bulb Booster (9-9-6) is an excellent source of all 3 nutrients.

Finding a place for bulbs

Bulbs can be planted in existing perennial beds in a group for a "bouquet" effect. Larger bulbs such as daffodils or tulips work well by this method. A grouping of a minimum of 5 to 7 bulbs is required to give the necessary impact. Smaller bulbs can also be done this way but even more bulbs, at least 13-15, are necessary.

Bulbs can also be planted in a lawn area. Keep in mind that you will need to avoid cutting the grass in the area until the bulbs' foliage has died back. Because of this the earlier blooming bulbs are best.

For a woodland area, early to mid season bulbs that naturalize well are the best to use. (See "Bulbs for Naturalizing")

Design uses for bulbs

Groundcover: 3 to 10" bulbs to complement perennials or other taller bulbs. Examples include Scilla, Crocus, Eranthus, Galanthus, or Puschkinia.

Mass Color: Short (3 to 10") to Medium (12 to 18") bulbs used in large quantity. Daffodils or tulips work well.

Focal Point: Tall or especially bright colors. Traffic stopping variety used near a door or in a significant part of the garden. Unusual bulbs work well such as late tulips, fringed tulips, parrot tulips, double tulips, or Fritillaria.

Timing

If you will only see the area where the bulbs are planted after the weather is nice, then there is no reason to plant early flowering bulbs such as Eranthus. Plant late flowering bulbs and enjoy them when you 're in the garden.

If you have an area that can be seen from the house, then by all means use early-blooming bulbs like Eranthus, Galanthus, and Crocus.

Setting

For very close viewing you can use shorter bulbs or combinations of shorter and taller bulbs. If your viewing will only be from a great distance, use taller bulbs and bright colors that will "pop" out of the general view.

Keep in mind the general background color. You wouldn't want to plant purple tulips in front of a row of dark green yews. Nor would you plant white tulips in front of your white picket fence.