



FALL BULBS

Working with bulbs is the gardener's equivalent to wrapping a Christmas gift and then watching the recipient's eyes as the gift is unwrapped. For as gardeners we wrap our bulbs in soil in the fall only to wait for those same bulbs to shirk their cover and unfurl their precious gift of color onto their austere backdrop of dormant shrubs and trees 3-6 months later.

Bulbs are invaluable in their ability to "shorten" winter! But in the palette of items to use in our home landscape, they often fall into the category of "most missed opportunity". You must plant bulbs in the fall in order to have bloom in the spring. So warm up the shovel and read through the following pointers about working with bulbs. Bulbs like to be dry during their dormancy in the summer. Survey your yard now and avoid locations that gather water during the summer such as swales or the end of a downspout. Bulbs perform outstandingly on berms, but excess moisture will shorten the life of your bulbs.

Try to locate bulbs in sunny areas although early blooming bulbs grow in shady forest locations

because they bloom and grow prior to the trees leafing out. *Eranthus*, *crocus*, *Scilla sibirica*, *Galanthus* and *Chionodoxa* are all early bloomers. Daffodils however are happiest when grown far away from maple or spruce roots.

Bulbs can be interplanted in existing perennial beds. They are capable of handling the competition and offer an extra season of bloom. Bulbs may be planted with ornamental grasses and daylilies in massed beds or with mixed perennials in cottage garden beds. Suitable spring-blooming perennial helpmates are forget-me-not (*Brunnera* and *Myosotis*), bluebells (*Mertensia*), perennial alyssum (*Aurinia*) and *Helleborus* (Lenten rose).



False forget-me-not is a suitable choice to mix with spring bulbs.

A lovely effect can be achieved by planting bulbs directly into lawns. Bulbs exhibiting grassy

foliage and a tendency for early bloom adapt the best to this use. Or use bulbs in massed ground-cover beds of vinca, pachysadra, or even low creeping junipers. *Crocus*, *Scilla* and *Galanthus* are again valuable in creating a bi-ome in the lawn, where bouquet-planted daffodils and tulips are very showy in groundcover.

After *Crocus*, *Scilla* and *Galanthus*, daffodils are the most perennial of the bulbs. They are pest-proof and naturalize well without dividing. They are also salt-tolerant. Many members of the family can add the element fragrance to the garden. The Jonquilla group is known as having the most fragrant members. Pipit and Suzy, with their multi-flowering pale yellow or orange and yellow blooms are currently available. Triandrus group daffodils have a fruity fragrance. The lovely white Thalia is a good representative. Poeticus group daffodils exhibit spicy fragrance. Small-cupped white Actaea provides both abundant bloom and fragrance.



Tulips vary in their persistence in the landscape. Many are valuable for 1-2 years and then decline, whereas others become truly perennial. Tulips exhibiting the longest lives are those in the *Fosteriana* tulip group (which includes all the Emperor Tulips), the Darwin group (which includes 'Apeldoorn' and its cousins), and the many dwarf species tulips like 'Tarda', 'Lilac Wonder' and 'Bright Gem' and their other rock-garden relatives who form wide flat colonies. The most fragrant tulip

available is the orange and purple 'Princess Irene'.

Tulips are heavy feeders and appreciate a yearly topdressing, in fall, of bulb fertilizer. Daffodils require less fertilizer but should their bloom lessen, they will come around again using the same topdressing method of fertilizer in the fall. Where excessive moisture is an issue, the following bulbs have shown good tolerance: *Camassia*, *Cyclamineus* group daffodils (includes 'Jetfire', 'February

Gold', 'Jack Snipe' and 'Peeping Tom'), *Leucojum*, *Galanthus* (snowdrops). If rodents are a problem, gravel, milorganite or even castor oil can act as a repellent when used at planting time. Rabbits and deer react negatively to Thai hot pepper oil sprinkled on the leaves and buds of tulips.

