



MINOR BULBS. MAJOR IMPACT

Don't put away those trowels just yet. With a little effort this fall, next spring will be ablaze with the color of flowering bulbs. While tulips and daffodils are traditional favorites, there is a multitude of lesser known dwarf or "minor" bulbs that weave glorious color and texture into the spring garden.

Most of these hardy beauties are a snap to plant because of their diminutive size. And since many do not grow beyond a height of 6 inches, they can be planted in lawns, among beds of ground-cover and at the base of trees and shrubs. Minor bulbs provide a carpet of color beginning as early as February, helping gardeners shake off the winter blues and look forward to another season of growth.

Many of the minor bulbs are used for naturalizing, a term which refers to planting in random, natural-looking drifts versus rows or straight lines. Bulbs are often used this way in a woodland setting, along banks, or in lawns. Small bulbs can also be planted in clusters of a dozen or so in between perennials - a practice

known as "bouquet" planting. The bulbs' fading foliage will then be camouflaged by the emerging leaves of neighboring plants.

Eranthis, or winter aconite, is a member of the *Ranunculus* family, and is often seen blooming through snow in February even before crocus make their debut. Its whorled leaves form a collar beneath golden yellow buttercup-like flowers. Winter aconite is an enchanting sight poking through a bed of English ivy or blanketing the feet of a shrub border. Dappled shade is ideal light for *Eranthis*, though full sun will also do. Before planting, soak the bulbs overnight as they tend to be dry upon purchase.



Winter Aconite is one of the first to bloom.

Another early bird, common snowdrops or *Galanthus*, is known for its nodding white flowers rimmed in green. Add these gems to a rock garden or along a

pathway in an area that receives light to partial shade - the east or northeast side of a house is ideal. 'Flore Pleno' is especially pretty because it is a double flowering variety. Try combining snowdrops with winter aconite for a dazzling effect.



Bees enjoy snowdrops, too.

At about the time *Galanthus* emerges, the Spring snowflake, *Leucojum vernalis*, appears. Fragrant white flowers tipped with green bloom above 2 to 4 inch stems. Plant it near an entryway or in raised areas where it can be readily appreciated. The Summer snowflake, *Leucojum aestivum*, blooms shortly thereafter and has a bit taller stature - 9 to 12 inches. It bears a striking resemblance to Lily of the valley and is a beautiful sight at water's edge. Both are delightful additions to the spring garden and are definitely underused treasures.

Glory-of-the-snow is so named because of its tendency to bloom through the snow in its native mountainous habitat of Asia Minor, though it can certainly do the same in the midwest. Botanically known as *Chionodoxa*, this bulb grows from 3 to 6 inches tall with grasslike foliage upon which bloom light blue, star-shaped flowers with white centers. *Chionodoxa* is best in full sun to partial shade, but avoid planting in areas that are too hot or dry in summer while the bulbs are dormant.

Puschkinia is a little known member of the lily family with bell-shaped whitish-blue flowers distinctly marked with a darker blue stripe, giving it the common name of striped squill. Its loosely clustered blooms appear in March to April and will return with vigor year after year. Enliven a bed of hosta or pachysandra with this 4 to 6 inch beauty.

Another vigorous member of the lily family, *Muscari armeniacum*, is best known as grape hyacinth. Its stout spikes of blue, grape-like flowers are fragrant and its vigor can be a bonus if left to naturalize in a lawn. If more restrained behavior is needed for a garden situation, try 'Blue

Spike' which is a lighter blue, double-flowered variety that is sterile. Grape hyacinths are most effective in masses and look terrific under spring-blooming Forsythia or interplanted with creeping phlox. They also look stunning as foreground plantings to tulips and daffodils.

Anemone blanda can easily complement tulips and hyacinths, but its daisy-like flowers and ferny foliage do a nice job on their own in rock gardens and perennial beds. Blooming in March and April, colors include

white, blue, pink and mauve - all centered with yellow. It's wise to soak rhizomes in slightly warm water overnight before planting. If in doubt about which is the top or bottom of the bulb, plant them horizontally. Left undisturbed, *Anemone blanda* will spread into wide patches of color each spring.



A familiar sight in lawns come

March is the Siberian squill, *Scilla siberica*. Its bell-shaped violet blue flowers and straplike leaves spread easily from year to year creating a carpet effect. Aside from naturalizing in lawns, this bulb is useful planted in groundcover beds, in woodland or rock gardens and perennial beds as long as the space can accommodate its spreading habit. Many gardeners choose these bulbs for its beautiful blue color, though pink and white varieties are available and equally hardy.

Wood hyacinth, *Scilla campanulata*, offers pastel shades of pink, white and blue bell-shaped flowers blooming in mid spring. These robust, 8 to 10 inch plants naturalize well and look fabulous with mid to late blooming tulips.

Ornithogalum is a North American native also known as the Star of Bethlehem. Star-shaped white blooms suspend from one side of its 12-inch scapes. *Ornithogalum umbellatum* spreads very quickly and some consider it a pest. A better choice for gardens is perhaps *O. nutans* because it is less aggressive in habit. Enjoy its nodding white and green flowers both in the garden and in cut arrangements.