



These 'Minor' Bulbs Have Major Impact in the Spring Landscape

The temperatures may be cooling, but don't put away your trowel just yet. With a little effort this fall, next spring will be bursting with the color of flowering bulbs. Tulips and daffodils are traditional favorites for good reason, but there is also a multitude of lesser known dwarf or 'minor' bulbs that weave glorious color into your landscape in spring.

Most of these beauties are easy to plant because their bulbs are so small. Many of them do not grow taller than 6 inches so they can be planted in the lawn, among beds of ground cover, and at the base of trees and shrubs.

Minor bulbs create a carpet of color beginning as early as February helping you shake off the winter doldrums and look forward to another season in the garden.

Many of the minor bulbs are used for naturalizing or planting in random, natural looking drifts instead of rows or straight lines. Bulbs are often used this way in woodland settings, 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 where their fading foliage will be hidden by the emerging foliage of neighboring plants.

Galanthus, commonly called snowdrops, are often seen blooming through snow in February. Their nodding white flowers are touched with green. Plant these gems in a rock garden or along a pathway where you can appreciate their delicate flowers. Flore Pleno, a double flowering variety, is my favorite.



Another early bird bloomer is the crocus. Their colorful, cup-shaped flowers rise 3 to 6 inches in shades of blue, violet, yellow, and white. Because they flower so early in spring, they can be planted in lawns and will multiply over time to create masses of color.

Scilla siberica, or Siberian squill, is often seen as a sea of blue in March. Its tiny bell-shaped violet blue flowers and strap like leaves spread quickly to form masses in rock gardens, in ground cover beds, perennial borders, in lawns, or under trees and shrubs. They grow in full sun but prefer a spot in part shade.



Grape hyacinths, botanically known as *Muscari armeniacum*, brighten spring gardens with spikes of blue, grapelike, fragrant flowers. These vigorous growers will quickly naturalize in lawns or at the base of trees or shrubs. Grape hyacinths are most effective in masses and look beautiful under forsythia or interplanted with creeping phlox. They are also stunning when planted with other bulbs like tulips and daffodils.

I plant a few grape hyacinths with all my other tulip and daffodil plantings because they serve as garden markers. Grape hyacinths push their foliage from the ground in the fall reminding me of the locations of previously planted bulbs.

Before you put your garden to bed and head inside for the winter, take a few minutes and plant some minor bulbs. You will be greatly rewarded next spring when your landscape comes alive with color.



Diana Stoll is a horticulturist and the garden center manager of The Planter's Palette, 28W571 Roosevelt Rd., Winfield, IL 60190. Call 630-293-1040 or visit their website at www.planterpalette.com.