



Planting Bulbs

Fall may be the time many gardeners focus on garden chores that tuck their gardens in for their winter naps, but they should be spending some of their time toward making next season's garden wake up in a burst of color.

Fall offers the perfect time to plant bulbs and a great way to spend some time outdoors in the cooler temperatures of fall. Planting bulbs takes a little planning and a leap of faith, but you will be rewarded with a visual feast next spring.

Here are some hints to help you choose from all those spring-blooming bulbs to create colorful combinations you can enjoy as early as February and well into June.



Bulbs are generally categorized by their bloom time: early, mid or late spring blooming. When pairing different varieties, be sure to select bulbs that have the same bloom time. Crocus can share space with early-blooming daffodils. A little later, the small botanical tulips can intermingle with fragrant hyacinths.

Choosing bulbs from each category of bloom time will ensure that there's a continuous show of color. Winter aconite can appear as early as February; single, late-blooming tulips often bloom into June. Also, consider whether there are shrubs or perennials nearby that will be flowering at the same time as your bulbs.

Why not take advantage of that forsythia in full bloom by underplanting it with blue scilla and red tulips? Or you might try planting a grouping of grape hyacinths beneath an old-fashioned bleeding heart.

Blue and yellow create a classic combination that is easy to achieve with spring-blooming bulbs. Pair yellow daffodils or tulips with any of the blue flowering bulbs: anemones, scilla, grape hyacinths, or blue-flowering hyacinths. There are selections of these in the early, mid and late-blooming categories.

Combining analogous colors (those next to each other on the color wheel) is another way to create harmonious bulb partnerships. Orange tulips planted with yellow daffodils is just one example.

Complementary colors (those opposite each other on the color wheel) unite blue and orange, red and green, or yellow and purple. Plant grape hyacinths with orange tulips; purple and yellow crocus; or simply red tulips against its own green strap-like foliage are examples of complementary color schemes.

Monochromatic color schemes can also be lovely. Pink tulips planted with pink hyacinths is soothing simplicity. White tulips planted with white daffodils glow beautifully in the spring moonlight.

Or use white to create striking contrast with dark colors. The effect of white contrasted with deep blue, red or orange is dazzling. Imagine white daffodils partnered with deep red or burgundy tulips – wow!



Hopefully, I have convinced you that time spent now will be well worth the effort, so head to your local garden center. Choose healthy bulbs, free of blemishes or soft spots. Bulbs should feel firm. Choose the largest bulbs you can find. Smaller bulbs are often available at discount stores; but the larger the bulbs, the larger the flowers.

If possible, plant bulbs starting in mid to late September. If you must store bulbs after you've purchased them, keep them in a cool spot and move them from their package of plastic to paper bags so they won't mold.

Most bulbs require soils with good drainage. If you have heavy clay soil (like most of us), add in lots of organic matter before planting your bulbs.

Incorporate bulb fertilizer into the soil when planting. Water well after planting and mulch to conserve moisture and maintain a more even soil temperature while bulbs are settling in.

Take the leap of faith, plant some bulbs this fall, and look forward to spring filled with color.



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