

## Flower Bulb Planting

### When to Plant

For cold hardy bulbs like tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths, plant new bulbs in the fall. The best months to fall plant are October and November. By this time, a lot of our seasonal color has dwindled and we don't feel bad pulling out annuals to plant our spring flowering bulbs. These months also provide a better chance for soil moisture from rain that makes our digging easier.

### Where to Plant

All spring flowering bulbs want sunny locations. Remember, early flowering bulbs like snow drops, crocus, daffodils, and early tulips bloom before the leaves come on the trees. That means you can plant these and other early flowering bulbs under shade trees which will allow these bulbs to grow and bloom before any shade sets in.

### How to Plant

Bulbs can be planted in rows like soldiers or planted five to seven bulbs to a hole which is called bouquet planting. I prefer the latter. To me, it looks more natural and you have space in between those clusters to plant other plants that will help camouflage the leaves of the bulbs after they finish blooming. Most tulips, daffodils, and other bulbs bloom from 1-2 weeks. You can double the time of each variety by digging your hole as deep as the variety should be and adding 2 inches. Plant 4 of your bulbs in the bottom of the hole. Add 2 inches of soil and plant 3 more. The shallower bulbs will bloom first and the deeper ones will bloom through the others starting a week later. This type of piggyback planting will double your bloom time. You can also use different colors. This will drive your neighbor's nuts when they think your daffodils were white one week and yellow the next.

### Dividing Bulbs

The best time to divide your cold hardy bulbs is in the spring as the leaves start to dwindle, approximately 6 weeks after flowering. The spent leaves will have matured after blooming. Carefully dig down around the outside of the buried bulbs with a shovel or gardening fork and lift up the bulbs. Remove any dried leaves still attached. Also remove any smaller attached bulbs (called bulblets). You can now relocate the freshly dug bulbs and, if you like, plant the smaller bulblets to the new growing area you've assigned them. The smaller bulblets will probably not bloom the next 2 years, but eventually, they will. Some gardeners will tell you to wait until fall to replant your dug-up bulbs, but don't listen, you'll wind up forgetting about them after football starts in August and finally find them next spring looking for that misplaced paint brush.

### Forcing Bulbs Indoors

Nothing can be more spring inspiring than a pot of blooming tulips or daffodils on our coffee table in the dead of winter. Sound difficult? Not really. You can force narcissus, tulips, hyacinths, and crocus to bloom indoors. Purchase the bulbs in the fall along with some bulb pots and loamy potting soil. Pot up crocus leaving the bulbs 1 inch below the soil surface in the pot. With tulips, narcissus and hyacinths, leave the pointed top out of the soil ½ of an inch. All of these bulbs need 12 weeks or cool to cold

temperatures. Add 3 more additional weeks for tulips. The best way to achieve this is planting the potted bulbs outdoors in the soil and covering the buried pots with 4 additional inches of bark mulch. Any time after the necessary weeks of cooling, start bringing in those buried pots. Place them in indirect light in a room with temperatures around 65-70°. Water the pots as often as the soil feels dry. Within 2-3 weeks you'll have flowers.

Another type of indoor forcing is with pre-cooled hyacinths and narcissus that you can buy in the fall. These two groups will grow and bloom in a saucer filled with pebbles and water. Simply place the bulbs on the pebbles with water, not so deep as to touch the bottom of the bulbs. Place in a dark closet until roots start to grow and the tip starts showing new growth. Bring out into a room with good daylight and enjoy the bloom. Continue to add water to the pebbles as needed. To keep paper whites leaves short and stocky, add a teaspoon of gin to a quart of water, and use this mixture to keep water in the saucer. It works!

### Why Won't my Tulips Bloom a Second Year?

Tulips and daffodils, actually all bulbs, are meant to be naturalized. By that, meaning they want to be planted in their own area, away from summer blooming flowers that we tend to water all summer. After the cold hardy bulbs finish blooming in the spring and their leaves turn brown, the bulbs remaining in the ground don't want to be watered or fertilized from above. Tulips are most sensitive to this intrusion. The result, your tulips and some of your daffodils don't flower or in some cases, don't even grow the next season. Plant your cold hardy bulbs in areas that you don't tend to during the summer. Perennials, such as daylilies, work well in spring flowering bulb areas because of their low, summer maintenance. There are many other perennials and a few annuals that are also compatible due to their low summer maintenance.

### A Final Note

The weather in Ohio in the spring can be warm, cold, and then warm again. When this type of weather occurs, our bulbs can start poking leaves out of the ground early. We have a natural, caring tendency to go out and cover those green leaves. Don't, the bulbs know what they're doing. If they didn't want to be there, they wouldn't be there.

We can have daffodils and early tulips showing bloom color when a night freeze is about to occur. What to do? *Nothing*. Hardy bulbs are just that, hardy. All spring flowering bulbs can take a lot of cold weather. More damage can occur to the blooms on a cold night trying to cover the flowers with a bed sheet, than the cold air will ever do.

