



## FALL BULBS

Looking for a colorful spring display of flowers like tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths? Fall is the time to plant spring flowering bulbs.

Fall-planted bulbs need the cooling period of winter to bloom. But they also need time to establish a healthy root system to survive the winter frost. The best time to plant fall bulbs is in October after the temperature drops to 65 degrees.

**Storing bulbs:** Prior to planting, bulbs need to be kept in a cool and dry location. The warmer temperatures in spring along with healthy rain activate bulbs. So similarly, storage in areas that have higher moisture and heat will trigger the bulbs to grow. Bulbs with sprouts can still be planted, but the sprout should not be damaged or removed; otherwise, they will not grow. Gardeners can purchase bulbs early in the season and store them at home in the same conditions: a cool, dark, dry location.

**Selecting bulbs:** Bulbs should be firm when selected, not mushy or soft as this indicates a dead or bad bulb. Occasionally mold may form on the outer skin but can easily be brushed off. This causes no harm to the bulb.



Gardeners who deal with deer and rabbits can use resistant varieties to help curb destruction in their gardens. This includes scilla, snowdrops, daffodils, hyacinths, and alliums. While these plants are not favored as meals by deer and rabbits, they will eat anything if hungry enough.

**Planting bulbs:** Proper location and good soil preparation are key when planting bulbs. Plant bulbs in areas with good drainage as they are harmed by areas where water pools. If you have heavy clay soil, loosen it to a depth of 10 inches before planting and add compost to lighten the soil.

Always place the bulb with the pointed side up, and the flatter side (often with tiny roots) down. Cover with soil, and water, and let the winter rains and snow take care of watering until spring. Bulbs are generally planted about 8" deep for larger bulbs, and 5" deep for smaller varieties. A general rule of thumb is that bulbs should be planted twice as deep as their height.

Fertilizer does not need to be applied when planting bulbs. However, when bulbs first push their shoots up or after flowering, they will benefit from the application of a slow-release fertilizer such as Epsoma Organic Bulb Tone. Most general fertilizers are too harsh for bulbs.

To create large washes of color, plant bulbs staggered or in clumps. Paying attention to bloom times when planting can help fill in spent blooms in the garden and create a show of color that lasts all spring. For example, crocus will appear first, followed by daffodils, and finally tulips. Early blooming bulbs can be planted beneath trees where they will get enough spring sunlight prior to trees leafing out.

**Caring for bulbs after flowering:** After the flower has bloomed and faded, do not cut down the leaves and stalk. Let the plant die back naturally and brown out over the course of six to eight weeks. During this period, the flower bulb will gain back energy spent in flowering and continue its life cycle.

A popular belief is that bulb foliage should be tied. However, it is better to leave them be so that they can prepare for the next season. Once the foliage is brown, remove the spent leaves. Many bulbs, like crocus, narcissus, and hyacinths need this period to prepare for the next spring.

Gardeners who do not like the look of dying foliage should plant bulbs among perennials. As the perennials emerge, they will cover up the bulb foliage.

If cared for properly, many bulbs will return and bloom the following spring. Daffodils, crocus, hyacinth, muscari, and alliums, are varieties that will naturalize in the garden if their foliage is left to fade. After several seasons, some bulbs will need to be dug up and divided. This helps ensure vigorous flowering.