



## Planting Fall Bulbs = Fabulous Spring Blooms

*Making the effort to select, plan and dig in fall bulbs will result in a seemingly effortless spring display. Soil preparation is key, as well as taking a few simple precautions to ensure success.*

### *picking your favorites / making a plan*

- ❖ **Timing:** In St. Louis it is best to plant bulbs around mid-October; they can be planted as late as Thanksgiving. For best selection and quality, you should buy bulbs as soon as the September bulb displays go up. Put your bulbs in labeled paper bags and keep them cool, dark and dry until planting time.
- ❖ **Continuous bloom:** Early = aconite, snowdrop, crocus, scilla, species tulip, mini-daffodils, Virginia bluebells  
Middle = grape hyacinth, daffodil, fritillaria, dwarf iris, hyacinth  
Late = poet's narcissus, tulip, Dutch iris, Spanish bluebells, allium
- ❖ **Colors:** Monochromatic drifts or loosely spaced clusters of 3 – 9 bulbs will give a more natural look. Many perennials will still be dormant when early bulbs are blooming, but consider how the later bulbs will coordinate with surrounding plants.

### *choosing a location / preparing the bed*

- ❖ Almost all spring bulbs will need a part to full sun exposure (at least 4 – 6 hours). Exceptions are the sun lovers: tulips, hyacinths, and Dutch iris which must have full sun (6 or more hours).
- ❖ Bulbs do fine planted among perennials as long as they are not subjected to indiscriminate irrigation. Early blooming perennials can complement spring bulbs and, as they expand, will hide their fading foliage.
- ❖ Ideally, you could plan a new bed for bulbs, improving the quality of the soil with Dr. Earth Motherland compost, adding Turface to improve the drainage and thoroughly mixing in Espoma Bulb-tone (3-5-3) for balanced fertilization. Building a berm or raised beds would be optimal for growing bulbs, especially in St. Louis with our heavy, clay-based soils.
- ❖ If you are adding bulbs to existing, well-drained beds, however, you can dig holes for 3 – 4 bulbs at a time. In this case it is better to top dress with Bulb-tone to avoid burning new roots. The other perennials will also benefit from the fertilization.
- ❖ As a general rule of thumb, bulbs should be planted at a depth of 3 times the diameter of the bulb. Spacing will differ by type of bulb. We suggest mixing types, layering by depth, with an odd number of bulbs and an irregular layout.
- ❖ Adding 2 – 3" of compost as a mulch will help retain moisture and control weeds. This should be an annual fall task!
- ❖ Thoroughly water your planted bulbs and mark them so you don't accidentally dig and injure them.

### *successful perennializing and after-care*

- ❖ Almost all bulbs will come back year after year given proper conditions. Exceptions: hyacinths, which might give you a second year, and most tulips which will need to be planted every year. Listed in order of bloom time, the tulip groups that will perennialize are: species tulips, T. kaufmanniana, T. fosteriana (aka 'Emperor'), T. greigii, and the Darwin hybrids.
- ❖ To deter voles and squirrels dip bulbs in Bobbex or scatter Critter Ridder. Layering daffodils, alliums and fritillarias over or near the tulips and crocuses may also discourage them. Unfortunately, as a deer deterrent, fencing is the only option.
- ❖ Bulb-tone should be applied every year in the fall and then once again in the spring just as the bulb foliage is emerging.
- ❖ Dead-heading is largely an aesthetic choice except for tulips whose seed-production will drain energy from the bulb.
- ❖ Foliage must remain until it naturally yellows and falls so that photosynthesis will feed the bulb and help it to expand.