



## Planting Fall Bulbs for Fabulous Spring Blooms

*This is one aspect of gardening that requires thinking ahead! Soil preparation is key, as well as taking a few simple precautions to ensure success. Making the effort to select, plan and dig in fall bulbs will result in a seemingly effortless spring display.*

- 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, random clusters of 3-9 bulbs will give a more natural look.

## Choosing a Location / Preparing the Bed / Successful Perennializing

- The sun lovers are tulips, hyacinths, and Dutch iris which must have 6 or more hours of direct sun. All the other spring bulbs will be fine with a part-sun to full sun exposure of 4-6 hours or more.
- Bulbs do fine planted in among perennials as long as they are not subjected to indiscriminate irrigation during summer dormancy. Early blooming perennials will 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 *Surface* 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. To avoid burning the new roots as they develop, top dress with *Bulb-tone*, which will benefit neighboring perennials as well.
- 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.
- 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. The tulip groups that *will* perennialize are:  
species tulips, *T. kaufmanniana*, *T. fosteriana* (aka 'Emperor'), *T. greigii*, and the Darwin hybrids.
- To deter digging voles and squirrels, dip bulbs in *Bobbex-R Animal Repellent* or layer daffodils, alliums and fritillarias above tulips and crocuses. *Critter Ridder* will deter nibbling rabbits in spring but as for deer, 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.