

When Do We Plant Bulbs?

Part I

The ideal time for planting most bulbs in the Central Valley is roughly between Halloween and Thanksgiving. Since the warmer climate of the valley doesn't provide the necessary chilling period required by bulbs such as tulips, crocus, hyacinth, and snowdrops, artificial chilling becomes necessary.

Long time Master Gardener, Butch Barton, facilitated a class on growing bulbs last Saturday at Garden of the Sun. Barton recommends chilling tulips and hyacinths bulbs in the refrigerator for at least 6 weeks before being planting.

Have you run out of time to chill your bulbs? Don't despair, there are other choices available. You might be surprised to discover how many beautiful varieties of daffodils on the market. Photographs and descriptions can be found on the website address provided below. Best of all, daffodils do not require chilling.

Other bulb choices that can be planted in fall for spring blooming:

- Amaryllis,
- Daylily
- Freesia
- Narcissus
- Ranunculus

Follow these basic rules when planting bulbs:

- Select firm bulbs, not soft, diseased ones.
- Buy bulbs early in the fall for best selection and then hold them in a cool place in a paper bag or sawdust until planting time. Do not store in plastic.
- On the day you plant, soak the bulbs in water for half an hour.
- Dig a hole 3 times as deep as the bulb is wide, amend the bottom of the hole with bulb fertilizer or bone meal, and plant the bulb tip up.
- Make sure the ground is wet, not soggy before planting.
- Use soil with good drainage

From an ascetic point of view, plant odd numbers of one color of bulb since even numbers appear unnatural. Try planting at least 5 of one color together. Another suggestion would be to use only pastels, or alternatively, use only bold or primary colors. 15 bulbs of the same type and color, or at least the same color group, works well for a small or medium-sized garden. For a larger garden 30 - 50 would be preferable.

How deep should bulbs be planted? Generally, if the bulb is a large such as Tulip, Daffodil or Hyacinth, dig the hole about 6" to 8" deep. If the bulb is small, such as a Crocus, Snowdrop, Scilla, Dwarf Iris, Muscari or Bluebell, dig the hole about 3" to 5" deep. Bulbs should not touch. Clusters of five bulbs planted in a group, allowing space around each one, aids in creating an attractive growing pattern.

Spring flowers growing from bulbs generally last only one or two years. This includes most varieties of tulip. If you want spring flowers that return year after year (called perennials) consider using: Muscari, Lily Of The Valley, Snowdrop, Anemone, Trumpet Daffodil, Jonquilla Daffodil, Long Cup Daffodil, Short Cup Daffodil, Poeticus Daffodil, Species Daffodil, Kaufmanniana Tulip, Greigii Tulip, Fosteriana Tulip, Botanical Species Tulip And Darwin Hybrid Tulip.

A comprehensive website with information specific to bulbs can be found by going to www.theplantexpert.com/springbulbs. Topics such as fragrant bulbs, reliable bulbs, unusual bulbs, bulbs for shady or windy areas, climate appropriate bulbs, deer resistant bulbs and much more are listed.

Part II on bulbs will focus on what to do after the bulbs stop blooming. Along with this, questions from readers on the subject of bulbs, tubers, corms and rhizomes will be explored.

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