

PLANTING FALL BULBS

WHAT IS A BULB?

A bulb is a swollen storage system. Also, included in this family are corms, tubers, and rhizomes. Bulbs include tulips, daffodils and lilies. Corms are crocuses, colchicums and gladioli. The family of tubers includes begonia, anemones and cyclamens. The last group covered will include rhizomes; iris and trilliums.

LIFECYCLE OF A BULB.

Most true bulbs are perennials with a life span of three to six years. During the life span of the bulb they self propagate before dying down. Some bulbs like bedding tulips are exhausted after a single season and have to be replaced annually. A bulb contains an embryo flower, a short stem and tightly packed leaves. The roots and some shoots start to grow during early autumn. The shoots remain below the soil at soil level until late winter. At this time the day length cause the roots to become active and extensive. Once the soil warms up the leaf shoots extend. The bulb splits and releases the flower deep inside. The split bulb breaks into parts and produces dormant bulbs at its base. These bulbs become daughter bulbs later on in the cycle.

Flowering lasts for several weeks. Most are insect pollinated. Some bulbs are sterile. When flowering is over remove the old flower stems to prevent seed formation, which will drain energy from the bulb. The leaves will remain green for weeks building up energy reserves with the bulb. The green stems will die back to brown. Remove once the stems are brown and faded. By the time the cycle has finished the bulb will have split into 2 to 3 parts. These will be new bulbs next season.

HOW AND WHERE TO PLANT.

There are bulbs for almost every situation in your yard. To include; borders and bedding displays and rock gardens. Depending on what you are trying to achieve you have bulbs to match almost every environment. One area we will exclude here in Colorado is a woodland bulb like hardy cyclamens.

Not all the bulbs you plant now will bloom in the spring. Some bulbs will bloom early spring, some will bloom mid summer and some will bloom in the fall. It's all in the planning.

Most bulbs need well-drained soil to thrive as well as full sun. There are a few varieties of bulbs for shade. These include; Chionodoxa, scilla, anemone, galanthus, puschkinia, muscari, allium moly. Carmassia, and fritillaria.

Bulbs do not require a great deal of watering. If we have a mild and dry winter it is important to water at least once a month. In the summer during the bulb's dormant season a lot of watering is not necessary. They set next years growth in a dry hot location.

TERMS:

Naturalizing is to create an area that looks as natural as possible. Plant the bulbs at random in lawns or meadows.

Bedding displays is a way to create a formal seasonal bulb garden that is arranged in colorful patterns.

Rock gardens are usually smaller and more delicate looking bulbs. They are usually mixed with alpine plants that also provide color and texture

HOW TO PURCHASE BULBS

To ensure a pretty bloom and quality plants you have to first start with a quality bulb. Look for bulbs that are firm, clean and free of blemish. It is especially important to check the area around the root zone. This should also be firm and free of blemish.

UNPREPARED AND PREPARED BULBS

The prepared bulbs are indicated in small print on the top of the bulb box, We also separate the prepared bulbs are separated from unprepared bulbs. A prepared bulb is a bulb that has had an extended cooling period for indoor forcing. In our selection Hyacinth bulbs are the only prepared bulbs that we sell. Paperwhites and amaryllis are also in our selection for indoor forcing, but the do not require pre-chilling.

A word on indoor forcing, the hyacinth will still require 6 to 10 weeks of additional chilling at 40 degrees.

PREPARING THE GROUND

Bulbs cannot thrive in hard clay soil. In this area it is best to do ground preparation with compost. Even if you are in sand it is good to add compost for nutritional benefits. Bulbs require well-drained soil. The more organic material you can add to your gardens the better.

AS far as how deep to plant your bulbs, a good rule of thumb is to plant the bulb 3 to 4 times the height of the bulb.

Once that it gets good and cold, usually around December, it is good to add a layer of mulch over your bulb beds. This helps to keep the bulb cold instead of allowing the soil temp to fluctuate with out warm winter days. This can confuse the bulb and it can come up to soon.

FERTILIZERS

Our Colorado soil is usually not deficient in calcium so, the use of bone meal is not necessary. Phosphate will aid in growth and bloom production. Apply a small amount in the hole when you plant your bulbs and feed again with a liquid fertilizer as the bulb breaks the surface of the soil and then again every 2 weeks until bloom fades.

Bulbs are one of the easiest plants to add to your garden and I think it shows a gardener with a sense of hope and believes in the promise spring.

"Did you ever think how a bit of land shows the character of the owner?"

Laura Ingalls Wilder