



Planting Fall Bulbs

What are bulbs?

A bulb is a swollen storage system. Included in this family are corms, tubers, and rhizomes. Bulbs include tulips, daffodils, and lilies. Corms: crocuses, colchicums, gladioli, etc. The tuber family includes begonia, anemone, and cyclamen. Lastly, are rhizomes: iris and trilliums.

Lifecycle of a bulb

Most true bulbs are perennials, with a lifespan of three to six years. During the lifespan of the bulb, they will 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 causes the roots to become active and extensive. Once the soil warms, the leaf shoots extend. The bulb splits and releases the flower deep inside. The split bulb then breaks into different sections 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, as it will drain energy from the bulb. The leaves will remain green for weeks building energy reserves within the bulb. Green stems will die back to brown. Remove once 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, as well as 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 cyclamen.

Not all bulbs planted now will bloom in the spring. Some bulbs will bloom in early spring, some in mid-summer, and still others 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 water. However, if we have a mild, dry winter, it is important to water at least once a month. In the summer, during the bulb's dormant period, a lot of watering isn't necessary. They will set next year's growth in a hot, dry location.



A few terms to know:

- Naturalizing is creating an area that appears as natural as possible. Plant bulbs at random in lawns or meadows
- Bedding displays are a way to create formal, seasonal bulb gardens that are 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 an attractive bloom and quality plants, you have to start with a quality bulb. Look for bulbs that are firm, clean, and free of blemishes. It's especially important to check the area around the roots. This should also be firm and free of blemishes.

Unprepared versus prepared bulbs

The prepared bulbs are indicated as such in small print on the top portion of the bulb box. We also separate the prepared bulbs from unprepared. Prepared bulbs are those that have had an extended cooling period that allows for indoor forcing. Hyacinth bulbs are the only prepared bulbs that we carry. We do, however, also carry paperwhites and amaryllis, which do not require the pre-chilling process in order to be forced indoors.

Tip: Hyacinths 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 prepare the ground with compost before planting. Even with sandy soil, it's recommended to add compost for nutritional benefits. Bulbs require well-drained soil. The more organic material added the better.

A general rule for planting depth is 3 to 4 times the height of the bulb.

Once it's been cold more consistently, usually around December, it's good to add a layer of mulch over bulb beds. This will help the bulb maintain a consistent cool temperature instead of allowing its temperature to fluctuate. Temperature inconsistency and warming can confuse the bulb and cause it to emerge too soon.

Fertilizer

Soil in Colorado isn't usually deficient in calcium, so the use of bone meal isn't necessary. Phosphate will aid in growth and bloom production. Apply a small amount in the hole when planting your bulbs and feed again with a liquid fertilizer as the bulb breaks the soil surface, and then again every two weeks until blooms fade.