

Planting Fall Bulbs

A guide to planting and caring for fall-planted bulbs



At a Glance

Lifespan: Most bulbs are perennials and will last around 3 to 6 years.

Care: Bulbs need well-draining soil, most need full sun; research your particular bulb for its specific preferences.

Choosing a Bulb: Choose bulbs that are firm, clean, & free of blemishes, especially in root area.

Prepared vs Unprepared: Prepared bulbs have had a long cooling period for indoor forcing.

Prepare the Ground: Bulbs will not thrive in hard clay, add compost to provide key nutrients.

Fertilizer: Phosphate will aid in growth & bloom production

What is a Bulb?

A bulb is a swollen, underground storage system. Also included in this family are corms, tubers, and rhizomes. Tulips, daffodils, and lilies are all bulbs. Crocuses, colchicums, and gladioli are corms. Begonia, anemones and cyclamens are in the tuber family. Lastly, within the rhizome group are iris and trilliums.

Life Cycle of a Bulb

Most true bulbs are perennials, with a lifespan of 3 to 6 years. During the lifespan of the bulb, it will self-propagate before it dies down.

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 or at soil level until late winter. At this time, the length of the day 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 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 are sterile. When flowering is finished, remove the old flower stems to prevent seed formation, which will drain energy from the bulb.

The leaves will remain green for weeks, building energy reserves within the bulb. The green stems will die back to brown. Remove only when stems are brown and faded. By the end of the cycle, the bulb will have split into 2 or 3 parts, and these will be next season's bulbs.

Timing and Environment

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

Most bulbs need well-draining soil to thrive, as well as full sun. There are a few varieties of bulbs for shade. These include: Chionodoxa, scilla, anemone, galanthus, muscari, allium, 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, extra watering is not necessary.

How to Purchase Bulbs

To ensure a pretty bloom and quality plants, you must first start with a quality bulb. Look for bulbs that are firm, clean, and free of blemishes. It is especially important to check the area around the roots; this should also be firm and free of blemishes.

Unprepared vs Prepared Bulbs

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

Tip: The hyacinth will still require 6 to 10 weeks of additional chilling at 40 degrees.

Preparing the Ground

Bulbs will not thrive in hard clay soil. It is recommended to add compost to the existing soil. This is also true for sandy soil, as compost adds in a lot of key nutrients. The more organic material added to your garden, the better. Bulbs will also need soil that drains well.

Planting

The best general rule of planting depth is to bury the bulb at a depth around 3 to 4 times its size. Plant with pointy side upward, and roots downward.

Once weather is consistently cold, usually around December, it would be recommended to add a layer of mulch over the bulb beds. This helps to insulate the temperature of the bulb, keeping it cold, rather than allowing the temperature of the soil to fluctuate on warmer days. This could potentially cause confusion for the bulb, and result in it trying to come up too soon.

Fertilizer

Colorado soil generally has sufficient calcium, so implementing bone meal is not always necessary. Phosphate will aid in growth and bloom production. Apply a small amount in the hole when planting bulbs, and feed again with a liquid fertilizer as the bulb breaks the surface of the soil, and then again every 2 weeks until blooming begins to fade.

Bulbs are some of the easiest plants to add to a garden, and can provide a gardener with a sense of hope in the promise of spring!

For More Information*



[CSU Extension, Plant Spring Plant Talk Colorado, Fall Bulb Flowering Bulbs in the Fall](#)

[Planting for Spring Blooms](#)

[CSU Extension, Fall-Planted Bulbs & Corms](#)

[Plant Talk Colorado, Maintaining Bulbs](#)

*Descriptions are clickable. For hard copies, please scan the qr codes with your phone's camera to be taken to the destination.