

Spring Flowering Bulb Selection Made Easier

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Are you confused by all the different bulbs sold at garden centers? More than 4,000 varieties of tulips are available but, to make your selection easier, they are grouped into several classes.

Some common types of tulips and their characteristics include:

Darwin tulips, which are late flowering and probably the most favored, growing 22 to 30 inches tall and producing large, deep-cupped, solid-colored flowers on strong stems.

Parrot tulips, with blooms featuring twisted petals with featherlike edges, and which grow 20 to 28 inches tall, and are late flowering.

Cottage tulips, long-stemmed varieties with slender buds and long, pointed petals, growing 16 inches to nearly three feet tall and blooming in May.

Kaufmanniana tulips, which are early flowering and are sometimes referred to as "water-lily" tulips because their pointed petals open horizontally like those of water lilies, growing only four to eight inches tall, and excellent for rock gardens.

Fosteriana tulips, which grow 8 to 20 inches tall and have blossoms as large as four inches. These were crossed with the Darwin tulips to procure the Darwin Hybrids, which grow 22 to 30 inches tall and are the largest and most spectacular of all the tulips.

Double Late tulips, sometimes called peony-flowered because of their resemblance to peonies, growing 18 inches to about two feet tall and very attractive.

To most gardeners, spring bulbs mean tulips, crocuses, hyacinths, and daffodils. Species tulips and species crocus are smaller yet earlier than the hybrid types. There are a number of other "minor" bulbs available that provide color in the garden and fill in among rock gardens, borders, under trees, or among shrubs. Most need to be planted in sun or part shade. Plant them in mass for the best show, 3" to 4" apart and 3 to 4" deep.

The following three are very early blooming:

Galathus or Snowdrops grow only 4 to 6 inches tall. The white flower is bell-like.

Eranthis or Winter Aconite, grow 3-4" tall and produce a deep yellow, buttercup-like flower about 1½ inches wide which grows above a finely frilled collar of bright green.

Scilla siberica Spring Beauty are best known for their intense blue, 1" star-shaped flowers on 4 to 6" stems.

Muscari or Grape Hyacinth, have tiny blossoms that appear on spikes in mid-April. Muscari come in blue or white. A showy double blue grape hyacinth is Blue Spike.

Pusdikinia is closely related to Scillas. It flowers later in spring. Pale blue and white striped flowers grow on a 5 to 6" plant.

Scilla hispanica or Wood Hyacinth/Spanish Bluebell bloom in May. Bell-shaped flowers on 10-15 inch open spikes. Colors include white, pink, and blue. They can take deep shade and bloom with the Darwin tulips.

Alliums or flowering onions vary in height from 9 inches to 5 feet. Alliums bloom in May, June, and July, with white, yellow, red, or pink flowers.

Plant the bulbs 2 to 3 inches deep, and 6 to 15 inches apart in clumps of 6 to 12 bulbs. The Allium genus is best known for its edible members — onions, garlic, chives and leeks — but it also contains many ornamental species.

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