

# Spring Bulbs And Color

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The winter of 1995-96 will be remembered as the harsh winter that lingered until June. In May our internal clock told us that spring had arrived but the soil temperatures and phenology records told a different story. Essentially, we were robbed of spring.

But the strange spring did not suppress appetites for recreation and color. So as the golfing warriors become more and more restless, the spring maintenance to open facilities became more condensed and frantic.

The late, frenzied efforts to uncover greens, pick up debris, fix irrigation, and more, resulted in postponing some tasks. Bedding plants and landscaping projects had to be delayed. This spring the landscaping timetable looked much different. Instead of concluding projects by Memorial Day weekend, the projects were just beginning.

Fall plantings of bulbs could have lessened this spring crunch dilemma and quenched the thirst for color. A multitude of different and unique bulbs is available but concentrate your initial efforts with tulips, daffodils and hyacinths. They produce vivid color splashes with no spring effort. They are the new year's gift.

## Steps to Creating a Successful Spring Bulb Display

**1. Design a flower bed.** Identify one or two key locations and create a mass display. When using tulips or hyacinths, a formal display is recommended. Avoid experimenting with small quantities of numerous cultivars all in one bed. The result will look like a "test plot." Select one cultivar for the mass planting. To achieve a dramatic display, the bed size should be a minimum of 100 square feet. Daffodils are best used in an informal or "naturalized style" of landscaping. Delineate irregularly shaped beds in the existing landscape. Combine three to four similar cultivars of daffodils to extend the bloom period.

**2. Use premium, high quality grade bulbs. . . the larger the bulb, the better.** Depending on the location, a "landscape grade" bulb may suffice, but the premium grade is always preferred. Particularly with daffodils, the highest grade bulbs can be the most economical choice. The large central bulb often has one or two side "bulblets" that will flower also.

**3. Prepare the planting area.** Rototill the area to a



*A late spring dusting of snow does not freeze the Daffodil foliage or flower.*

depth a few inches deeper than the planting depth of the bulb. Since bulbs require good drainage, amend existing soils with compost or peat and raise the bed to help eliminate excess water. When drainage is poor, diseases and rotting organisms will prevail.

**4. Plant the bulbs at correct depths and spacing.** Heavier soils will necessitate planting an inch or two shallower than these recommended dimensions. Note that the depth indicates the positioning of the bottom of the bulb, not the top.

- Daffodils 7" deep and

spaced 5-7" apart.

- Tulips 5" deep and spaced 6-8" apart.
- Hyacinth 6" deep and spaced 6-8" apart.

The bulbs require planting in early to mid-fall season. The time in the ground prior to hard frosts is needed for the bulb to root. If shoot growth should emerge in the fall, little if any winter injury occurs. Avoid late, last minute efforts to throw bulbs in the ground before the hard frosts. The results are less than optimum. To enhance rooting, sprinkle bone meal or bulb booster (complete fertilizer, i.e. 8-8-8) on the soil beneath the bulb.

**5. Care after flowering.** After the spring flower display, the decision must be made. Should the bulbs be treated as an annual or perennial? Tulips and hyacinths perform at their highest level the initial year of planting. Since quality decreases each season, the results in the third year are disappointing. For this reason, tulips and hyacinths are often treated as an annual and replaced each fall in high traffic areas. The other option is to dig the bulb clumps up in the fall, divide the bulbs and replant. This task can be very time-consuming. Daffodils, in contrast, continue to increase in quality year after year. The initial cost of daffodils is higher than tulips but their continual increase in quality make them a better long term investment. After flowering, the foliage must be left to dry and wither as the nutrients drain down and replenish the bulb. A criticism of daffodils is the unsightly stage of "dead looking foliage." Consider interplanting daffodils within ground covers such as daylilies to mask the withering foliage.

Bulbs can be a rewarding addition to the golf course. The early spring timing of the color make the labor and expense well worth the effort. Any questions, call (612) 933-6465 or E-mail address: flowers29@skypoint.com