



Early-blooming bulbs grow well at the base of trees, along parking lots and near building entrances, as demonstrated here in Colonial Williamsburg.

SHOUT 'SPRING!' WITH COLORFUL BULBS

Myriad bulb varieties will turn up the color volume on spring landscaping displays.

by Ann Reilly

The saying that good things come in small packages certainly is true where spring-flowering bulbs are concerned. These self-contained packages of foliage and flowers will welcome spring with vivid colors year after year.

The bulbs, triggered into motion by time and/or temperature, are very reliable plants. They're the first to arrive in spring and make a visual impact that is difficult to surpass the rest of the season.

Although only some plants, such as daffodils and hyacinths, are actually true bulbs, there are other plants that grow in a similar manner and are called "bulbs," even though they are technically corms, rhizomes or tubers. These plants are grouped to-

gether under the heading of "spring bulbs" because they are all planted in fall when they are dormant and grow and flower the following spring. Once flowering is complete, the foliage manufactures food, stores it in the bulb for the following year and dies down.

Bulbs in the landscape

Nothing shouts "spring" louder than a magnificent bulb display, especially one tastefully integrated into the landscape. Long before any color is contributed to the garden by any other plant, bulbs, such as winter aconite, snowdrops, bulbous iris, early-blooming species crocus and the later-blooming hybrid crocus, are poking their heads through the ground,

leaves and even snow.

Smaller bulbs are the earliest to bloom and therefore should be set where they will be noticed up close. Besides growing in the lawn, they grow well at the base of trees, along the edges of parking lots, near building entrances—wherever they will be in view of public places.

A little later, Grecian Windflower, Siberian Squill, Glory of the Snow and Puschkinia bloom when days are still bleak and trees and shrubs are just beginning to bloom or leaf out.

Early bulbs

All of these early bulbs can also be naturalized into the lawn, as it has not yet started to grow.

Early tulips and daffodils form an

BULB FLOWERING SCHEDULE

FLOWERING TIME	PLANTING DEPTH	SPACING	FLOWERING HEIGHT
Very Early			
Galanthus (Snowdrops)	4"	2"	VL
Eranthis (Winter Aconite)	4"	2"	V
Iris Reticulata	4"	2"	VL
Crocus	4"	3"	VL
Chionodoxa (Glory of the Snow)	4"	2"	VL
Puschkinia libanotica	4"	2"	VL
Fritillaria Meleagris (Guinea Hen Flower)	4"	5"	L
Early			
Kaufmanniana Tulip	6"	5"	VL
Fosertiana Tulip	6"	6"	L
Single Early and Double Early Tulips	6"	6"	MH
Muscari (Grape Hyacinth)	4"	2"	VL
Miniature Daffodil	6"	5"	L
Trumpet Daffodil	6"	6"	MH
Hyacinth	6"	6"	L
Mid-Season			
Greigii Tulip	6"	6"	L/MH
Mendel Tulip	6"	6"	MH
Triumph Tulip	6"	6"	MH/H
Darwin Hybrid Tulip	6"	6"	H
Short-cupped Daffodil	6"	6"	MH
Poeticus Narcissus	6"	6"	MH
Jonquil	6"	6"	MH
Taxetta Daffodil	6"	6"	MH
Fritillaria Imperialis (Crown Imperial)	8"	12"	H
Late			
Scilla campanulata (Spanish squill or Wood Hyacinth)	4"	3"	L
Darwin Tulip	6"	6"	H
Lily-flowered Tulip	6"	6"	H
Cottage Tulip	6"	6"	H/VH
Parrot Tulip	6"	6"	MH/H
Double Late Tulip	6"	6"	MH
Very Late			
Dutch Iris	4"	5"	MH
Allium	6"	12"	VH
<p>CODE: VL = Very Low (up to 6") H = High (20" to 28")</p> <p>L = Low (6" to 12") VH = Very high (over 28")</p> <p>MH = Medium High (12" to 20")</p>			

Source: Ann Reilly



Late-blooming tulips make a strong impact on the landscape, filling the time void between early-blooming bulbs and flowering trees and shrubs.

enchanting silhouette in front of forsythia and can be united by a border of pansies.

Fragrant hyacinths bloom at the same time as most daffodils and can be added to this scheme, under magnolias or in front of early-blooming rhododendrons such as the P.J.M.

Late bloomers

Grape hyacinths, blooming a little later, add complementary blue to the pinks of flowering crabapples, cherry and peach; with red tulips, they are dazzling.

With late-blooming azaleas, Scotch broom and dogwood, combine late-blooming tulips, Dutch iris and wood hyacinth. Allium can add color and a unique accent to early perennials and tie the two seasons together.

Late-blooming tulips, hyacinths, daffodils and the more unique summer snowflake, crown imperial and allium, bloom with late-spring shrubs

and early perennials and should be a part of the overall plan. Because they are larger than the earlier bulbs to flower, they can deliver a greater impact and help to fill the time void between early bulbs, flowering trees and shrubs, and summer annuals.

Steep slopes and rock walls are also excellent sites for large bulb plantings. Whether the hills are lined with evergreen shrubs or with perennial ground covers, bulbs can transform them into a kaleidoscope of color.

Informal bulbs such as daffodils, squills and anemones are better choices here than formal bulbs such as tulips and hyacinths. These same bulbs and others, such as guinea hen flower or star-of-Bethlehem, are perfect for naturalistic, rustic, or woody landscapes.

Where to plant

Tulips and hyacinths are most effectively planted in formal masses in the

flower bed or border. After their bloom fades, color can be achieved with annuals in the same spot.

Most bulbs like to be planted in full sun, but since most of them bloom before the trees leaf out, they will probably be in sun anyway, unless shaded by a building. Bulbs grown in shadier situations will bloom a little later, will have more intense color, and have longer lasting flowers.

Geometric patterns and logos are very effective in bulb plantings.

Planning for bulbs

The first decision to be made is whether you want a formal or an informal planting. This depends to a great extent on the style of the landscape.

The formal garden is symmetrical with regular borders and should be planted with formal bulbs such as tulips or hyacinths. It is effective only when color is used in mass or in large blocks.

Informal beds are more natural in look, with bulbs planted in drifts rather than in rigid lines. Colors can be mixed more heavily and still be effective.

A color wheel will help you create color harmony. In a formal garden it is best to use one dominant color with no more than two complementary colors in the same area. In an informal design, color use can be freer, but it is nevertheless more effective if used with rhyme and reason.

Color schemes

The color scheme can be monochromatic (one color), analogous (three colors) or complementary, which could be achieved with red tulips and purple-blue grape hyacinths.

Match bulb color to the color of trees and shrubs in bloom at the same time. Select different varieties of bulbs if you want to insure a continuity of bloom from early spring to early summer.

Consider the view of the design from different angles: the approach, the walkways and the outside as well as from inside the buildings. Raised beds can add drama to a view while correcting poorly drained soil.

Plan to plant the bulbs in groups. In formal designs, these groups will naturally be large. Even in informal designs, plant in clumps of three to 12, depending on the size of the plant. It's far better to plant three groups with four tulips in each one than to line a dozen tulips in a straight line in front of a hedge. For best visual effect, there should be only one color in each clump.

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When bulbs are used in a naturalized setting, select a spot where they will not have to be disturbed until their foliage dies away.

Privacy desired

When bulbs are interplanted with groundcovers or existing plants, it is possible that nothing further will need to be done with the area after the bulbs fade. In large beds and borders, add annuals as soon as they can be planted in the spring. Where perennials and bulbs are used together, try to plant and divide both at the same time. That way you know where everything is.

Geometric patterns and logos are very effective in bulb plantings. Depending on the time of year you are looking for the bloom to occur, choose among more formal bulbs like hybrid crocus, hyacinths, grape hyacinths and tulips for this type of bulb planting. They can be sketched out on graph paper in advance, and the same plan can be used to replant the area with annuals if you desire.

Planting bulbs

If you want top quality flowers, you must plant top-quality bulbs. Don't try to skimp: you and your customer will only be disappointed at the small flowers and the poor performance. Purchase large, firm bulbs that do not have visible scars, bruises or soft spots.

Until you plant your bulbs, be sure to store them in a dark, dry and cool area so they will not rot, grow or dry up. A covered box inside an unheated maintenance building or garage is an ideal location.

You can plant spring bulbs any time in the fall until the ground freezes. If you can't plant all of them at once, start with the smaller, earlier-flowering bulbs and end with the tulips.

Because bulb roots reach deep, deep soil penetration is critical. Plow, spade, or double dig to a depth of 12 inches for the largest bulbs, six inches for the smaller ones. Drainage and aeration are especially critical for bulbs to prevent rotting over winter. Add organic matter to equal 25 percent of the soil volume to insure correct soil consistency.

Planting large areas

It is easiest to plant large areas by digging out the entire bed to the proper depth, placing the bulbs in place, and replacing the soil. Note the planting depth of the bulb, or plant to a depth of 2½ to 3 times the bulbs' width.

In formal plantings, set out at least three rows of bulbs in straight lines. In

Caring for bulbs is easy

Care for bulbs is minimal. A few simple tips will keep them at their blooming best.

Since bulbs manufacture and store food each year, feeding them is essential. An all-purpose fertilizer high in phosphorus added as growth begins or as the foliage begins to fade is best.

When large bulbs (tulips, daffodils, hyacinths) have bloomed, cut the flowers off immediately so they don't set seed. That way they direct their energy into the bulb for the following year. Smaller bulbs can be let go to seed, which will scatter and increase the colony.

Keep foliage

Never remove the foliage until it has turned brown. Bulbs planted in a grassy area should be early-blooming types so the browning of the foliage doesn't interfere with mowing the grass.

The foliage of most bulbs is gone within a month after blooming. The foliage of daffodils however, hangs around for six to eight weeks, which can cause problems. In planting beds, the foliage can be braided or folded out of the way.

Smaller is simpler

Many of the smaller bulbs need no further attention after they

are planted. They will naturally increase and form large groups. Daffodils and crocus need dividing every four to six years, when the flowers decrease in size and the planting becomes crowded. The best time to do this is in the spring right after the foliage fades.

Tulips and hyacinth bulbs do not increase in most parts of the United States, and diminish in size each year. They will therefore need to be replaced quite often.

Some installations plant new tulips every year, cutting the foliage back as soon as it fades. The bulbs can be removed, but it's not necessary. Whether or not you do this or try to get several years out of tulips depends on your budget.

No pests, please

Bulbs develop few insect or disease problems. Virus diseases cause flowers to become misshapen or discolored. Since they cannot be cured, the only recourse is to dig up and discard the bulb.

Instant effect in small areas can be achieved by purchasing pots of forced bulbs, or forcing your own if you have a greenhouse facility. This is more expensive and time consuming, and the bulbs in most cases cannot be reused. □

informal designs, stagger the bulbs so they look natural. One good way to do this is to lightly toss them on the ground and plant them where they fall.

When planting, add superphosphate or bone meal to the soil in the bottom of the planting hole, and place the bulb on top of it. This will assure good root growth.

Keep animals away

If squirrels, chipmunks, or other small animals are a nuisance, place the bulbs in a wire basket and plant the basket, or place a layer of chicken wire over planting beds. Secure its corners to prevent it from being dug up.

Squirrels will eat the flowers of many hybrid tulips. If you have squirrels and cannot eliminate them by trapping, you may want to choose an-

other bulb. There really isn't much you can do about it. Dusting bulbs with Thiram before planting offers temporary relief. Dried blood was once highly recommended, but its effectiveness washes away with irrigation or rain. Repellants have some effectiveness.

After planting...

After planting, water well once, which should be sufficient until growth starts in the spring. Mulch with oak leaves, bark chips or other organic mulch, which will protect small bulbs from being heaved from the ground in winter.

Spring-flowering bulbs are small packages with big color impact. Plant some this fall. Although you won't be rewarded for many months, the impact on the landscape will be worth the wait. **LM**