

# Plant bulbs now, and get thanks in the spring

Your customers will love it when, with spring just peeking through the clouds, fall-planted bulbs begin to sprout colorful blooms.



Bulbs planted in pots add vivid color to a landscape site, without disturbing the turf.

■ If your customers would like to have flowers in your yard as early as next January, this is the time to plant bulbs, according to Penn State horticulture professor Dr. J. Robert Nuss.

"They're easy to plant, and they live for years," says Nuss. "Best of all, they start brightening the landscape while it's still late winter."

Spring and early summer flowering bulbs "must be planted in the fall in order to develop a good root system and satisfy the cold requirement of the specific bulb," notes Dr. A.A. De Hertogh of North Carolina State University, writing for the Netherlands FlowerBulb Institute. "In general, it is best to wait until soil temperatures are below 60° F. at the optimal planting depth."

Temperatures play an important role in bulb life, according to De Hertogh.

"When fall-planted bulbs have been purchased but are not yet planted, they should be stored between 55° and 65° F. and in a well-ventilated condition," he notes. "Do not keep them in paper or plastic bags unless specified. If bulbs are to be pre-cooled for (USDA) climatic zones 9 or 10, they should be held at 40-45° F. for 8 to 10 weeks

before planting in December."

Nuss and De Hertogh offer several bulb planting suggestions:

- Spring-flowering bulbs can be planted in formal or informal beds, rock gardens and in established ground covers.

- Most prefer partial shade, so avoid planting them where they will receive direct midday sun. Direct southern exposures are also not recommended.

- Heated basement walls can damage bulbs, so plant them at least five feet away from foundations.

- Care should be taken to eliminate all perennial weeds (quackgrass, Johnsongrass, bermudagrass, etc.) before planting.

- "Keep in mind that you can fit a lot of bulbs in one space by planting large bulbs, covering them with two inches of soil and planting small bulbs on top of them," says Nuss. "You can also plant shallow-rooted annuals on top of bulbs."

- Bulbs need good drainage and a high amount of organic matter with soil pH of 6 to 7. So if the soil is mostly sand or clay, mix in peat moss or compost until the organic matter is about 25 percent of the volume.

apart and five inches deep.

- De Hertogh says one of two fertilization regimes is best:

- (1) a single fall application of a sulfur-coated slow-release 9-9-6 fertilizer at planting time at a rate of one rounded tablespoon per sq.ft.;

- (2) bone meal incorporated in the rooting area at planting time with an application of 8-8-8 (one level tablespoon per sq.ft.) or 10-10-10 (one rounded teaspoon per sq.ft.) in the fall, followed by a repeat application of the same fertilizer as soon as the shoots break the ground in the spring.

- After placing the bulb, fill the hole. Replace half the soil and water the area thoroughly, add the remaining soil, and water again.

- "A three-inch layer of wood chips, peat moss or bark will retain moisture and keep mud from splashing on the flowers next spring," says Nuss.

- If you anticipate a squirrel or chipmunk problem, spread fine-mesh chicken wire over the soil and apply mulch to keep the pests from digging up the bulbs.

- In the spring or summer, as flowers fade, cut them off so they don't go to seed and rob nourishment from the bulbs.

"The foliage gathers nutrients for the next season's growth, so allow it to completely die before removing it," says Nuss. "Other than these few steps, spring-flowering bulbs don't need much attention. They'll come back year after year, just when winter seems it will never end."

*EDITOR'S NOTE: To receive a free, 28-page full-color booklet "Landscaping: Flower Bulbs for Long-Term Planting," write: BULBS, Landscape Management, 7500 Old Oak Blvd., Cleveland, OH 44130. Only the first 100 requests will be honored. These booklets are being provided to LM readers courtesy of the Netherlands FlowerBulb Information Center, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

## FOR PLANNING PURPOSES, THE BASIC PLANTING PERIODS ARE:

### USDA ZONE

### PLANTING PERIOD

3

September

4 and 5

September to early October

6

October

7 and 8

November to early December

9

late November to early December

10

December

(primarily pre-cooled bulbs)

- When planting tulips, daffodils and other large bulbs, dig out the whole bed to a depth of about eight inches. Arrange the bulbs six inches apart with the pointed ends up. Smaller bulbs such as crocuses and grape hyacinths can be planted three inches





## SELECTED FLOWERING BULBS FOR FALL PLANTING IN THE U.S.

NAME	COLOR	LIGHT REQ.	PLANT. DEPTH	SPACING	FLOWER. PERIOD	PLANT HEIGHT	HARDI-NESS	ADAPTED ZONES (USDA)
Allium (ornamental onions)								
aflatunense	purple	sun	5"	4"	L	25"	H	3-8
caeruleum	blue	sun	5"	2"	VL	20"	S-H	4-8
christophii	purple	sun	5"	8"	VL	20"	H	3-8
cowanii	white	sun	5"	4"	L	16"	T	8-10
elatum	purple	sun	8"	8"	L	30"	H	3-8
giganteum	purple	sun	8"	8"	VL	40"	H	3-8
neapolitanum	white	sun	5"	4"	M	15"	T	7-10
Amaryllis (Hippeastrum)								
hybrids	various	sun	8"	10"	L	35"	T	7-11
Anemone								
blanda	various	sun	5"	2"	E	4"	H	3-7
coronaria	mixed	sun	5"	3"	M	10"	S-H	7-9
Brodiaea laxa								
"Queen Fabiola"	blue	s/psh	5"	4"	VL	12"	H	5-8
Crocus								
chrysanthus	various	s/psh	5"	2"	VE	3"	H	3-8
flavus	yellow	s/psh	5"	2"	E	3"	H	3-8
sieberi	blue	s/psh	5"	2"	VE	3"	H	3-8
tomasinianus	purple	s/psh	5"	3"	VE	4"	H	3-8
vernus	various	s/psh	5"	3"	E	4"	H	3-8
Eremurus								
various	pastels	sun	5"	12"	VL	30-70"	H	4-7
Galanthus								
(Snowdrops)	white	sun	5"	2"	VE	4"	H	3-8
Hyacinthus								
orientalis	various	sun	8"	4"	E	10"	3-8	
amethystinus	blue, wh.	sun	5"	4"	L	10"	H	3-8
Iris								
(English Iris)	purp/blu	sun	8"	6"	VL	20"	H	3-8
hollandica	various	sun	5"	4"	L	20"	S-H	8-10
reticulata	various	s/psh	5"	2"	VE	6"	H	3-8
Lilium								
(Madonna Lily)	white	s/psh	5"	6"	VL	20"	S-H	5-9
Muscari								
Grape Hyacinth	blue	sun	5"	4"	M	6"	H	3-8
azureum	blue	sun	5"	1"	E	5"	H	3-8
botryoides album	white	sun	5"	1"	M	5"	H	3-8
Narcissus spp.								
(Daffodils)	various	s/psh	5-8"	4-6"	E,M,L	10-14"	H	3-9
Paperwhites	white	sun	8"	4"	VE	14"	S-H	8-11
Oxalis spp.								
(Shamrock)	various	sun	1"	2"	M	6"	S-H	7-9
Scilla (Endymion)								
Span. blue-bells	various	s/psh	5"	4"	L	12"	H	3-8
Siberian Squill	blue	sun	5"	3"	E	5"	H	3-7
tubergeniana	white	sun	5"	3"	VE	6"	H	3-7
Sparaxis								
tricolor	various	sun	5"	3"	VL	10"	S-H	6-9
Tulipa spp.								
(Tulip)	various	s/psh	8"	4"	M/L	6-15"	H	3-9

**ABBREVIATIONS:** s/psh=sun, partial shade...purp/blu=purple and blue  
 VE=very early...E=early...M=medium...L=late...VL=very late  
 H=winter hardy...S-H=semi-hardy...T=tender.

Source: Netherlands FlowerBulb Institute