



# SCORE BIG WITH BULBS

by STEPHANIE  
COHEN

**B**ulbs are one of the easiest choices for landscapers, whether new to the business or a sun-tanned veteran of the trade.

There are, however, a few things to keep in mind when using bulbs.

► Most do not like wet feet, so don't let them stand in water. Plant them in average, well-drained loam.

► Give them full sun when the leaves green up. This makes planting under deciduous trees or shrubs a perfect option. Make sure to mulch bulbs the first winter to improve the soil and protect the bulbs.

► Never remove the leaves from your bulbs until they have yellowed. This allows the

bulb to produce and store the food it needs to grow and make a magnificent display the following year.

Some of the best ways to use bulbs is to have them emerge between non-aggressive ground covers. I like short daffodils, species tulips, crocus, Grecian wind flowers, snowdrops and anything one foot tall or under.

They are also good to tuck among hostas, which by the

time they unfurl the bulb foliage can barely be seen.

#### **Daylilies**

For taller bulbs I like to plant with daylilies. The daylily foliage is excellent for hiding yellowing foliage. Both of them are easy to grow and are in the ground for the long run.

#### **Ferns with fronds**

Another choice is ferns with large fronds. Ferns and bulbs grow well together in a light to dense shade.

Big sweeps of bulbs are spectacular, but I cannot abide looking at yellowing foliage. In a regular annual or perennial border, plant bulbs way in the back, so that as everything begins to grow, foliage is hidden.

#### **Don't skimp**

When you plant bulbs, don't be skimpy. Minor bulbs such as crocus, winter aconites, snow drops, or scillas should be planted by the dozens. That's right: at least 12,

## Wholesale bulb sources

#### **Barbeleta Gardens**

15980 Canby Ave.  
Faribault, Minn. 55021  
307/334-2807

#### **De Vroomen Holland**

665 136th Ave. Box G  
Holland, Mich. 49424  
847/395-9911

#### **Holland-America**

P.O. Box 676  
Midlothian, Va. 23113  
804/379-0152

#### **Vandenberg Bulb Co.**

P.O. Box 532  
Chester, N.Y. 10918  
914/469-9161

#### **The Daffodil Mart**

7463 Heath Trail  
Gloucester, Va. 23061  
804/693-3966



but 24 to 36 is better for impact. In planting any of the larger bulbs, 12 is a minimal amount. Don't line them up like soldiers if you want a naturalistic effect. Plants in nature do not grow in a straight line. Plant them randomly in the design. In a woodland design, this is a given.

Things growing in a woods have to look natural. In a perennial design, plant between large perennials in the back of the border so foliage disappears. The more naturalistic the planting, over time you are less likely to have to go dig and divide.

For those of you who want to get the most out of your bulbs, plant bulbs with a bulb food, especially if soil isn't opti-

mum. Remember to topdress each year to keep your bulbs healthy, happy and to keep multiplying.

If you've noticed, I've avoided tulips and hyacinths. In most climates, these tend to last at best for three years. Many of you are better off planting in pots and removing them after flowering. In two to three years, tulips always become crowded and begin to produce smaller flowers and eventually just disappear. It may be best to treat them as annuals.

With bulbs, you get what you pay for. Larger bulbs produce larger, more vigorous plants and flowers. I always like to buy double-nosed or triple-nosed daffodils. I also like to ei-



These daffodils, when planted in groups, brighten a client's garden.

ther pick out my own firm, white bulbs or deal with a reputable wholesale bulb dealer. In buying bulbs "bigger is better".

Spring should be colorful, exciting and easy care. Many of the bulbs fit this category. Don't be afraid to experiment.

The more diversity you bring to the landscape, the more your clients will enjoy your design ideas. **LM**

*The author is a horticultural consultant and teacher living in Collegeville, Pa.*

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