

## GARDEN PALS:

# bulbs & perennials

Enhance next spring's color now with well-planned combinations of annuals and perennials.



Hyacinths and heather make a pleasant combination.

**f**all is the traditional season for planting tulips, daffodils and other bulbs that bloom in the spring. But fall is also a perfect time to plant such perennial "bulb buddies" as forsythia, heuchera, cowslip, hosta, golden feverfew, Myosotis (forget-me-not), ivy, Nepeta (catmint), and primroses and others.

Used in smart combinations, bulbs and perennials can create an especially intriguing spring border that serves as a springboard to a super summer landscape.

### Mix and match

When planning for early spring color, look to combine early flowering bulbs with perennials that produce early foliage and/or early flowers. The early, long-flowering miniature *Narcissus* 'February Gold,' for example, offers yellow flowers in exactly the same hue as *Forsythia intermedia* 'Golden

Bell.' This narcissus also teams up smartly with another perennial, yellow cowslip (*Primula veris*). Cowslip, in turn, is a good match for other narcissi such as the diminutive yellow favorite 'Minnow' and the elegant 'Louise de Coligny.'

For a sophisticated color combo, consider blue lungwort (*Pulmonaria angustifolia*) and the later flowering pale yellow *Narcissus* 'Jenny.' Both plants thrive in semi-shade and tolerate moisture well.

### Complementary colors

Bulbs combined with perennials in a landscape are used to complement, not dominate, the planting. The idea is to create a rich tapestry of color, form and texture. Avoid perennials that will spread too quickly and overpower their partners.

While huge beds of tulips or hyacinths were once mainly used to cut blazing swaths of color



Combine 'Queen of the Night' tulips, heuchera, wall flower 'Bowles Mauve' in one container.

that bloomed and then faded across the landscape, now they are often used in more subtle combinations to create evolving scenarios in the spring landscape. Shape, height, color, texture and bloom times should all be considered.

There's also a practical side to all this. After the flowers of spring bulbs fade, the remaining foliage is left to wilt and die back. While necessary, if the bulbs are to flower again next spring, this withering phase can be a let down in the landscape.

Planting with rapidly growing leafy ground covers such as hosta, leadwort, ferns and heuchera can be the answer. Camouflaging with appropriate perennials is a win-win situation – and pretty too. A planting of *Hosta tardiana* 'Halcyon' becomes something quite special with the blue hyacinth, *Muscari* 'Blue Spike,' peeking through. And

why not add tall, elegant green and white *Tulipa* 'Spring Green' to the mix for extra measure? After bloom, the tulips' fading foliage is easily masked by the fast growing blue-green leaves of the hosta.

#### The season marches on

Remember when mixing bulbs and perennials that shade-loving perennials can be combined with many sun-loving bulbs. The bulbs are at their best while the branches of deciduous trees are without leaves. Wooded areas often receive plenty of spring sunshine. By the time the early summer sun heats things up – and the spring-blooming bulbs are asleep for the season – the tree leaves have come out, providing plenty of shade for perennials.

Bulb and perennial combinations can be permanent additions to garden beds and borders. The bulbs should be planted a lit-

tle deeper, up to nine inches for tulips, and left in the ground after flowering. Each fall, some slow release bulb food, or a top-dressing of compost or other organic fertilizer will help them perform in spring.

#### Be Creative

Many combinations, even unusual ones can be perfectly pleasing. Consider clusters of tall, nodding white snowflakes (*Leucojum aestivum*) amidst the lovely leaves of *Geranium* 'Johnson's Blue.' Plant the white starbursts of *Tulipa turkestanica* amid the red-leaved wood spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides* 'Purpurea'). Groundcover plantings of smoky mauve heathers come alive in spring with surrounding sweeps of cobalt blue grape hyacinths (*Muscari armeniacum*).

Later in the season, brighten things up with *Tulipa* 'New Design' combined with brilliant blue *Scilla siberica* and peachy-pink and yellow primroses. For pink-on-pink, pair button-headed, daisy-like pink daisies (*Bellis perennis* 'Pomponette') with deep wine-colored, fringed *Tulipa* 'Burgundy Lace.' Or try May flowering camassias such as *C. leichtlinii* 'Alba,' which are perfect in a shady spot combined with ferns. For a spectacular summer combination, plant the great *Eremurus* (foxtail lily) with plant-buddy *Alchemilla* (lady's mantle).

#### Companionship contained

In containers, too, bulbs and perennials enjoy life together. Choose permanent residents first – perennials that will live serve as foliage or flower anchors. Bold hostas, giant ferns or pewter- or magenta-leaved heuchera are good examples. Now add dramatic seasonal "come and go players." An especially sophisticated springtime look pairs silver-leaved *Heuchera* 'Pewter Moon' with near-black *Tulipa* 'Queen of Night,' mauve wall flowers, and tall, willowy yellow cottage garden gems.

These are just a few suggestions; there are hundreds more. For as spectacular as bulbs are when planted by themselves, the pleasure is doubled when a little perennial companionship is introduced.

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