

# Think spring now!

*Order and begin gathering bulbs and plant material now for spectacular color in your clients' landscapes next spring.*

By STEVEN W. GUSTAFSON, Ph.D.

**I**t's September and high time to think about spring color. In fact, it's a great time to complete planning next year's spring flowering bulb and tuber gardens. Start acquiring your bulbs--don't put it off any longer--for this year's fall plantings. These flowers will provide spectacular color, blooming as early as early February in the Desert Southwest, March in the Southeast, April as you head north, and even May as you approach the Canadian border. Of course, it depends on your location, elevation and on any given year's weather.

El Niño dealt a real wild card this year. While crocuses were observed blooming in Oregon's Willamette Valley before the end of January this year, there were reports of snow in May near Redding, CA.

Besides beautiful, early color, there's another good reason to start planning your purchases of blooming bulbs now. They're like spring insurance. They can provide a good transition in ornamental beds when it's too wet, or otherwise inclement, to plant your spring and summer annuals. They can

save you from trying to explain to your clients why, during an April with more than six inches of rain, you don't have your annual color yet.

It's likely that if your company is known for providing color, you're already sold on the benefits of spring bulbs, so let's talk choices. Growing up in Oregon, I always awaited the first blooming snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*) in February as a sign that I might once again see some blue in the sky. Snowdrops were quickly followed by crocuses, tulips, daffodils, narcissi, hyacinths and other early bloomers. But, not all of these flowers are



Who wouldn't welcome this colorful spring display featuring a Kale Feather Mix, Tulip Goldader, and Pansy Crystal Bowl Mix? (Photos courtesy Post Landscape Operations, a division of Post Properties, Atlanta)



A well-thought-out planting of spring pastels, including Viola Lemon Chiffon, Tulip Attila, and Kale Winterbor.

early spring bloomers. Late-blooming varieties of most, including tulips, are also available in the trade. And pleasing to clients.

In between, there are nearly endless varieties of Asiatic, Day and Tiger lilies to give summer-long blooms from bulbs. For each genus of flowering bulb there are many different cultivars providing choices of color, height and textures. It's up to the discerning designer to make the best choices for their appli-

cation. Your local nurseryman can be a good source of information for the varieties and bloom dates for your region. Of course, studying flower supply catalogues is a great way to learn your plant material as you wind down during the evening.

Flowers from bulbs are an often overlooked source of color in commercial and institutional landscaping. One reason for this is that we, as commercial landscapers, are often entrenched in our usual paradigms (or stuck in a rut). We think of bulbs only in terms of large, mass plantings and are frightened by the potential cost of thousands of bulbs.

There are two fallacies we should rethink. First, what is the true cost of 'color' over a three-year period? If we compare the cost of one or two crops of annuals per season relative to the cost of bulbs, which supply several years of color, the cost difference over time is probably negligible.

Second, are mass plantings the only legitimate use of flowering bulbs? Of course not. We can use bulbs in smaller concentrations to provide interest in a mixed planting. Bulbs are especially effective when used in this manner along a portion of a free-form border. They are also effective in clumps along a foundation as a backdrop to shorter annuals.

Early spring color can also be provided by trees, shrubs and even over-wintered annuals. A sure sign of spring are the magnificent white blooms of ornamental pears. In Arizona, evergreen pear (*Pyrus kawakamii*), is popular, while in the Southeast it is the Bradford pear (*P. Calleryana*). Here in west Tennessee, flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*) and redbuds (*Cercis canadensis*) in bloom are two of the tell-tale signs that spring has arrived. Both are prevalent in both natural and man-made landscapes. Serviceberries, crabapples and cherries follow soon after.

While I lived in Tucson, we eagerly anticipated the brilliant yellow blooms of *Cassia artemesoides* in late January as a sign that 'winter' was on the wane. I liked to plant yellow cassias in front of purple

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## Video brings bulbs to the screen

For help in choosing your bulbs for next season, you might want to contact the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center, Brooklyn, NY, for your copy of the "Passion" video.

"Passion" is a fast-paced, entertaining look at the Dutch industry famous for its 400-year love affair with bulbs.

The 18-minute video is shot in the style of an MTV video, and captures the spirit and style of the Dutch bulb business, ranging from the history of bulbs during Holland's 17th century "Tulipmania" to modern techniques of tissue culture.

The video is the result of two year's shooting all over the Netherlands, and features sweeping aerial views of Holland's famous tulip fields, time lapse photography of bulb flower growth, and other colorful images and interesting information.

Copies of the video are available from US or Canadian bulb suppliers or from the International Flower Bulb Center in Holland (fax: 011-31-2525-226-92). For North American viewing, request tapes in NTSC American format. Cost is \$13 per tape, plus shipping/handling.



This grouping of spring flowers provide curb appeal color, and add interest to this corner.

*Dalea versicolor* which was usually in bloom since the previous November. This made a very nice combination.

Another early blooming desert favorite of mine is Texas mountain laurel (*Sophora secundiflora*). Analogous to cassia in the Southwest, yellow blooming forsythia in the North and Southeast is a sure sign that spring is near. Other temperate early blooming shrubs include bigleaf rhododendron, *Pieris japonica*, *Lonicera fragrantissima* and azaleas.

In Tucson, with the onset of warmer weather, fall planted pansies, snapdragons and petunias would also quickly revive. These were soon joined by many native desert plants and perennials, including desert marigolds and zinnias, brittlebush and many desert grasses. The Southeast can also enjoy an early revival of fall planted pansies and snapdragons. These often can accompany the early flowering bulbs in bloom following a mild winter. These all can serve as beautiful ground-level color.

The take home lesson is: it's the right time to plan for next spring's blooms. Trees, shrubs, perennials, bulbs and annuals can all contribute to a knockout early bloom. Plan now, plant this fall, and next year you and your clients can enjoy the bloom of your labor. **LM**

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