

# Spring Bulbs for the Garden

By Bethann Smith

After a month or two of perusing seed catalogs and gardening magazines in December and January, gardeners find themselves pacing the garden for that first glimpse of colorful foliage emerging from bulbs planted the previous fall. At least, this is what I find myself doing. The anticipation is palpable; I can hardly wait for the gardening season to begin its cycle again.

Everyone can create a beautiful spring garden with bulbs—no experience required! If a few easy rules are followed, you, too, will find yourself pacing the garden in February.

Bulbs must be planted in the fall. In the Skagit Valley, they can be planted as early as October or as late as the end of November (or at least before the first freeze). Bulbs need a dormant period of cold temperatures to stimulate their root growth. If you purchase bulbs early, and need to store them, keep them dry and cool, around 50 degrees.

When planning your bulb placement, consider your color palette. Think of your house color, the surrounding plants that will be in bloom at the same time, and the foliage color that will surround the bulbs. Next, you should decide if you are looking for colorful contrast or a complementary color.

You should always check the mature height of the plants that will spring forth from your bulbs. Be sure you aren't planting the bulbs behind something that will shield them from view. It's no fun to go through the work of planting bulbs, and then not be able to enjoy what you have planted. You might also consider where you will be able to see them from a window, since it's very enjoyable to be able to see them from the comfort of a warm home.

Large drifts of 12 to 15 bulbs are very satisfying. A lone spring bulb is not dramatic and looks rather forlorn on its own. However, you know best what flowers you prefer. Pick a flower bulb variety on a whim and try a small planting (three or five). If it does well for you, add more next year. Also, bulbs often will multiply over the years, so a planting that appears "thin" the first year often will eventually develop into a dense planting.

Most spring bulbs prefer full sun or partial sun, but will do fine in almost any location that has good drainage. Bulbs will rot in standing water, so avoid wet areas.

Generally speaking, bulb size matters. You should always try to purchase larger sizes because they will produce healthy flowers. If you want to naturalize them (placing them in wooded areas or in the lawn, not as a focal point in the garden), you can choose smaller bulbs, because if they don't bloom their first year, it won't be as much of an issue.

Bulbs have varied depth requirements, usually 2 inches to 8 inches. Follow the package directions. However, if for any reason you don't have directions, you can't really go

wrong planting any bulb at about 4 inches below the surface of the soil. It isn't optimal, but it can be done, and most of the time you'll get results that are close to perfect.

Happy planting!

## **Bulbs Workshop**

- WHAT:** "Bulbs to Brighten Your Spring Garden" — a free WSU Know & Grow workshop, will address old favorites and new offerings, including species bulbs for naturalizing. Presented by WSU/Skagit County Extension Master Gardeners, in partnership with the WSU/Northwestern Washington Research and Extension Center
- WHEN:** Tuesday, Sept. 18, 1:00 to 2:30 p.m.
- WHERE:** WSU-NWREC Auditorium, 16650 Memorial Highway (Highway 536), west of Mount Vernon
- SPEAKERS:** Jeannette DeGoede, owner of Tulip Town; and WSU Skagit County Extension Master Gardener Buzzy Marsh

Ideas and topics for future WSU Know & Grow workshops are welcome. Contact Ellen Cooley, WSU Master Gardener program coordinator, at [ellenc@co.skagit.wa.us](mailto:ellenc@co.skagit.wa.us) or 360-428-4270.

## **Colorful choices**

If you would like to see more than tulips and/or daffodils pushing out of your soil next spring, here are some suggestions to add more interest to your bulb garden:

- Blue Star Windflower (*Anemone blanda*)
- Snake's-head Fritillaria (*Fritillaria meleagris*)
- Bulgarian Ornamental Onion (*Nectaroscordum siculum*)
- Persian Fritillaria (*Fritillaria persica*)
- Wild Hyacinth (Camassia species, which includes *Camassia quamash*, *Camassia cuisickii* and *Camassia leichtlinii*)

Many of us are challenged by deer. Here are some suggestions for bulbs that are deer resistant:

- Allium (most deer resistant)
- Crocus
- Dwarf Iris
- Early Stardrift (*Puschkinia libanotica*)
- Fritillaria
- Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa forbesii*)

## **RESOURCES**

- [Gardening.About.com](http://Gardening.About.com)
- [Flower-gardening-made-easy.com](http://Flower-gardening-made-easy.com)
- [weblogs.newsday.com](http://weblogs.newsday.com)
- [Rochestergardening.com](http://Rochestergardening.com)
- [Flowerbulbs.co.uk](http://Flowerbulbs.co.uk)
- [Pallensmith.com](http://Pallensmith.com)