

Planting bulbs this fall

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Fall is the time to think about all those flowers we associate with spring: daffodils, crocus, and other easy-to-grow flowering bulbs. If you aren't growing any spring-flowering bulbs in your landscape, you are missing out on some easy-to-grow plants that provide early color to your garden.

The tulips and hyacinths that we love are short-lived here and are planted as annuals that bloom for one season. Then pulled up and removed. Our Springs are usually too short and too hot for these bulbs to add carbohydrates to the bulb to produce a flower bud. So they don't flower well or at all in the second spring.

These bulbs are planted in fall because it corresponds to the end of their natural dormancy. Most of these plants begin root growth in fall, followed by a cool stratification period necessary for proper flower development and then shoot growth in late winter and early spring.

No matter which bulbs you select, remember that the largest bulbs will produce the greatest show next spring. However, smaller bulbs will still produce some flowers, and these may be the best choice for mass planting or naturalizing. Avoid any bulbs that feel lightweight as these may have severely dried during storage.

Bulbs flower best when planted in full sun. For the earliest bloomers, this can be under a deciduous tree that hasn't leafed out. The plants have flowered and gone dormant by the time the trees have all their leaves on.

Bulbs look better when they are planted in masses, clumps or irregular areas instead of straight rows.

It's important to plant flowering bulbs at the proper depth, so inquire about plant depth at the nursery or follow the label directions. A light application of bone meal fertilizer at planting is often recommended, though probably not necessary. Most bulbs do not need fertilization until growth emerges in the spring. When you see plants emerging, apply 1 to 2 pounds per 100 square feet of a complete fertilizer (like 10-10-10).

Water the bulbs as soon as they are planted. Sometimes our autumn weather can be on the dry side.

Once flowering occurs, remove the faded blooms, but don't remove the foliage. The leaves produce sugars and other compounds necessary for the bulb to overwinter and bloom again the next spring. Most bulbs will enter dormancy in late spring or early summer and will renew growth, starting with the root system in the fall.

For more information on planting spring-flowering bulbs this fall, visit the Hardin County Cooperative Extension Service at 270.765.4121 or <http://hardin.ca.uky.edu/> or email Amy.Aldenderfer@uky.edu.

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