

NORTHERN

Gardener

CREATING & CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Bulbs



CARING FOR YOUR ENVIRONMENT

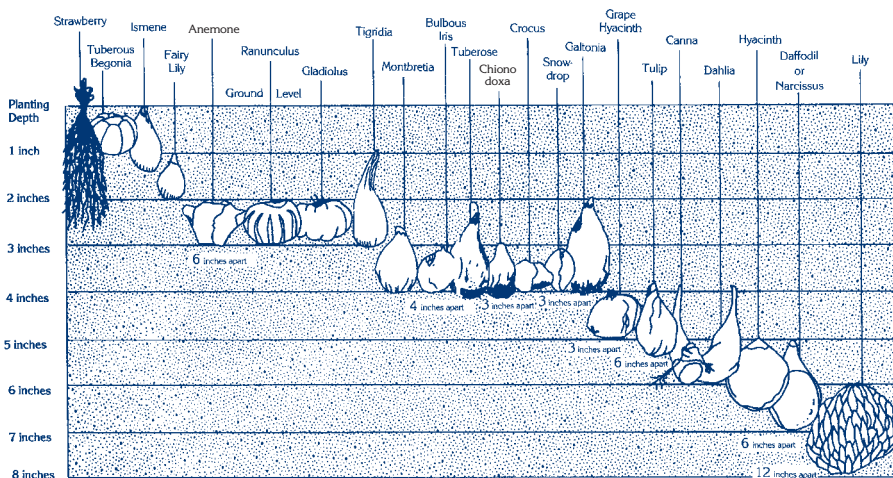
- ✓ Plant spring flowering bulbs in the fall and enjoy the “harvest of beauty” in the early spring.
- ✓ Bulbs bring a splash of fresh color to the landscape after a long winter.

Bulbs are one of the quickest ways to add color to the landscape. Many fall planted bulbs are among the first flowers in spring and with some of the brightest of colors. In summer, many of the spring planted bulbs provide us with cutflowers of unlimited colors as well as adding color to the garden.

A bulb is technically a particular type of overwintering storage organ of a plant, but the word “bulb” is often used as a general term to include bulbs, corms, tubers and roots of plants. That is how the word “bulb” will be used in this article.

Bulbs are generally divided into two categories. The first category are hardy and can be left in the ground over winter. These are best planted in the fall although some, such as lilies and peonies, can also be spring planted. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths and crocus are some of the more popular fall planted bulbs that will flower in the spring. The other category is the non-hardy types and these are planted in the spring, dug in the fall and stored for the winter. Examples of these non-hardy types would be tuberous begonias, gladiolus, dahlias and cannas.

Hardy, Fall Planted/ Spring Flowering Bulbs



Soil

Fall bulbs require good drainage to grow and flourish. Poor drainage will lead to bulbs that become diseased and fail to come up. If drainage is poor, correct it by adding an organic amendment such as compost or peat moss to the existing soil, or raise or slope the bed to help eliminate excess water.



When To Plant

Spring flowering bulbs need to be planted in the fall. To encourage good root development planting in September and October is best. This early planting allows good root development and better flowering the first year. There is no need to be overly concerned if growth should begin to emerge on newly planted bulbs in the fall. This happens frequently and there is little if any correlation with winter injury.

How To Plant

Begin by preparing the planting area, especially in heavy or compacted soil, Spade or rototill the area to 6-8" deep. Fertilizer, which is generally beneficial for long term performance, should be incorporated at this time into the rooting area of the bulbs. A good bulb fertilizer such as an 8-8-8 or similar analysis, should be used. Once the soil is prepared the bulbs should be planted to the depth indicated on the chart. In heavier soils it is advisable to plant an inch or two shallower than shown. Watering, especially when conditions are dry, is beneficial in settling the soil and encouraging rooting.

Spacing

Space the bulbs according to their ultimate size. In general, large bulbs should be spaced from 3 to 10 inches apart and small bulbs from 1 to 2 inches.

Splitting and Replanting

As long as the flowering is satisfactory there is no need to disturb fall planted bulbs. However, if

flowering begins to suffer you may want to consider digging your bulbs after the foliage has died, which would normally be in July or early August, and dividing or splitting them up. After digging allow them to thoroughly dry before splitting and then replant in the fall as described previously.

Care in Spring

Be sure to allow the foliage of spring flowering bulbs to turn yellow before removing it from the garden. This will allow the leaves to return food to the bulbs for the following spring's flower display. Many gardeners will plant annual flowers around bulb foliage to hide it as it yellows.

Spring Planted/ Summer Flowering Bulbs

When to Plant

As a rule most spring bulbs can be planted as soon as the ground can be worked in the spring but it is generally best to wait until the ground has warmed up. To get an earlier start with tuberous begonias, dahlias and cannas you may want to consider starting them

in pots in the house or other warm well-lit areas a few weeks prior to planting in the garden.

How to Plant

Planting directions are basically the same as they would be for fall bulbs, except omit the fertilizer with gladiolus. Gladiolus, dahlias and cannas would all prefer full sun while tuberous begonias will do their best in shady situations. Planting depth is given on the chart.

Digging and Storing of Bulbs

Summer flowering bulbs, if they are to be saved, need to be dug in the fall at the time of the first frost. Gladiolus should be allowed to dry or cure for several weeks before removing the old corm and then store uncovered in a cool, dry place. Dust with a bulb dust for insect and disease prevention. Dahlias, cannas and tuberous begonias should be allowed to dry for a short time before being packed in dry peat, sand or vermiculite and stored moderately cool for the winter.

