

**Dig hole,
insert bulb,
cover with soil.
That's it.**

WELCOME to Bulb Basics. Bulbs are easy, rewarding and beautiful. In fact, no other plant brightens a garden better than bulbs. Many spring bulbs burst forth in the dark days of late winter, when the garden is dormant and summer is just a theoretical possibility.

Which bulbs to choose?

Obviously, the first thing to do is buy bulbs. But which kinds? Generally, bulbs are rated for early, mid-season or late bloom. Around Durango, “early” is March. “Mid-season” is April and “late” is May. (See box at right.)

Botanic gardens and nurseries will always have the best bulbs. Don't waste your money on any bulbs from big box stores. Their bulbs are smaller and poorly stored. With bulbs, you always get what you pay for; low price = tiny bloom.

Planting

This is easy. A bulb is a self-contained flower. Here are a couple of guidelines.

- ◆ Plant a bulb three times as deep as its diameter. For species crocus, that's three inches. For big Darwin Hybrid tulips, that can be seven to eight inches. An inch or two off is no biggie.
- ◆ Bulbs go in the ground pointy side up.

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A wave of jewel-tone crocus (above) bloom with large purple *C. vernus* dwarf petit white and blue snow crocus, *C. chrysanthus* 'Lady Killer' as other species crocus do their spring thing in a Durango garden. Eastern Star tulips (above right) and Orange Comet daffodils join in the vernal chorus.



Timing is everything. How to get 3 months of blooms

Bulbs can provide waves of color from early March through late May. Here is the succession of bulb bloom times on the early, mid- and late-spring timeline. A sun-drenched garden along a south-facing wall could see “early spring” in mid-February while shaded areas may have “early spring” conditions on the first of April. Your garden will have these “micro-climates” influencing bulb growth and progression – which is another reason altogether to plant lots of different bulbs and plant them everywhere.

Early spring

- Snowdrop (*galanthus*)
- Winter aconite (*eranthis*)
- Rock-garden iris



Squills (*scilla*)

- Crocus
- Windflower (*Anemone blanda*)
- Grape hyacinth (*muscari*)
- Greigii tulips
- Fosteriana tulips
- Kaufmanniana tulips
- Species tulips (most)
- Hyacinths

Early blooming Iris reticulata mix 'Shades of Blue' provides stunning March color.

Mid-spring

- Daffodils (most)
- Darwin hybrid tulips
- Fritillaria* (crown imperial and others)

Late spring

- Spanish bluebell (*hyacinthoides*)
- Late tulips (single and double late)
- Dutch iris
- Alliums
- Poeticus* daffodils

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- ◆ Buy bulbs now at the DBS Online Sale while the selection is tops.
- ◆ Don't plant bulbs until mid-October. If your soil is too warm or wet, your bulbs will get soggy and rot. This won't be an issue because Durango Botanic bulbs are ready for pickup on Oct. 17 or 24. Perfect timing!
- ◆ You can plant as late as mid-November. Store your bulbs in a cool, dry place – garage, basement, etc.
- ◆ Big daffodils require a couple weeks longer to root than other bulbs, so get them in the ground sooner.

FERTILIZE? If you have poor soil, mix an organic bulb fertilizer with your backfill or use some Yum-Yum Mix or compost. Some gardeners use bone meal. "Regular" bone meal has been steamed and processed, so most of nutri-



Use lots of bulbs for impact. Be extravagant. Bulbs are cheap, especially small one. Plant small bulbs in drifts of several dozen, like this clump of *Tulipa bakeri* 'Lilac Wonder.'



Showy bulbs including tulips, daffodils and muscari make an exclamation point as perennials begin to stir .

tional value is gone. Organic bone meal will be best.

Whatever you do, **never add peat moss to a bulb planting** because it retains too much water.

But do water-in your bulbs after planting. Don't apply more water unless it gets really hot and really dry.

Cultural requirements

When people say "cultural requirements," it doesn't mean mandatory ballet. It means conditions bulb need to grow and spread.

"Woodland" bulbs prefer shadier locations and leaf-enriched soil like you'd find on a forest floor. Winter aco-

nites, snowdrops and squills are examples woodland bulbs.

Other bulbs, particularly species tulips and alliums, prefer sunny, dry soil.

Daffodils, crocuses and hyacinths will flower in part shade or full sun.

Virtually all bulbs hate "wet feet" or soggy soil. (Camassia is an exception.) Most plants – and bulbs – in Colorado's urban gardens die from too much water.

Water when the bulbs first start growing. Sprinkle some mild organic bulb fertilizer just as they emerge, if you want; no junky bagged "lawn" fertilizer—too much nitrogen). Ccut the water way back in summer when the bulbs are dormant in your soil.

After bloom

This is where some people get it all wrong. They cut back the bulb foliage after flowering. No! Other misguided gardeners fold over the foliage with rubber bands or (seriously) take the time to braid daffodil "leaves."

Nothing could be worse for the plant.

Bulbs need to "recharge" after bloom prior to going dormant. Interfering with the process will stunt or kill the bulbs.

Bulb foliage will die back on its own. When the foliage is tannish brown, then you can remove it. If dying bulb foliage annoys you, plant perennials adjacent to bulbs so their emerging foliage will mask bulbs' waning leaves.