

BULB PLANTING

When planting bulbs, the smallest mistake can lead to a garden full of dud bulbs. Here are some simple things to remember when planting:

- Always plant bulbs in borders or beds with good drainage. Planting bulbs in well-drained soil is vital and the most important instruction we can give you.
- Don't use any strong commercial fertilizer or fresh manure when planting bulbs.
- Always cut as little foliage as possible when cutting flowers from your bulbous plants. The leaves and foliage are essential for storing food for next year's blooming.
- Always let the foliage die back on its own in the garden before trimming it back or digging up the bulbs. Do not trim back healthy green foliage or the bulb will not perform well next year.
- Never dry bulbs in the sun, always in the shade in a well-ventilated area.
- Always store bulbs in a dry, well-ventilated area to prevent mold or mildew. Don't store them in an air-tight container.

When planting, you may wonder how deep is deep enough? As a general rule, most bulbs should be planted at a depth equal to three times their diameter. For example, plant a 2-inch bulb 6 inches deep. Remnants of roots on the bottom of the bulb should tell you which side of the bulb points down. If you see no sign of root remnants, plant the bulb so that the most pointed narrow part points up. If you have any doubts, ask your local nursery.

If you have heavy clay soil, try planting at one-half the recommended depth. The bulb won't have to expend as much energy struggling through the dense clay. You can plant bulbs individually by using a hand trowel or bulb planter. If you are planting many bulbs, dig one big trench or hole and place the bulbs in the bottom.

Most bulbs require well-drained soil. (Bulbs can rot in soggy, overly wet ground.) Before planting your bulbs, mix a slow-release, complete fertilizer into the soil in the bottom of the hole, then add a little more soil so that the bulb itself doesn't come in contact with the fertilizer granules. You can find appropriate bulb fertilizers in nurseries and garden centers. After planting the bulbs, water them thoroughly.

The planting method and type of bulb you choose can depend on the design style you want to achieve: natural or formal. Naturalizing refers to the ability of some bulbs to come back year after year. Some of the species tulips are good naturalizers, as are some crocus and many daffodils (and many other bulbs). In naturalistic design, you do your best to imitate a natural planting for a particular type bulb, and you choose bulbs that go on to naturalize on their own, thereby making the planting look more natural year after year. In formal design, it's unlikely you'd need or want bulbs that come back every year. Also, you may want to plant in carefully excavated beds to be sure that bloom times are identical.

Beware of the creatures! A gardener can be pretty perplexed when the 200 bulbs he or she planted last fall make just a meager showing in the spring. Yes, the reason could be inferior bulb quality or improper planting depth, but a likely culprit could be an animal. Chipmunks, voles, mice, deer, woodchucks, squirrels, and other animals forage for and feast on newly planted bulbs. But don't despair — you can grow beautiful flowering bulbs. Consider the following:

- Most critters leave daffodils and snowdrops alone, one big reason so many of these plants naturalize so well.
- Use bulb fertilizer or superphosphate instead of bone meal, which can attract some animals.

- If burrowing animals are a problem, plant in wire mesh bulb baskets.
- Use traps, barriers, or scare tactics.

With these tips in mind, you're ready to plant your bulbs. It will be spring before you know it and your TLC will be well received by your newly blooming bulbs. Happy planting!