

Plant Bulbs NOW for Spring

Fall is the best time to plant bulbs for spring flowering. Bulbs need time underground in the cool winter so they can develop and push out the roots that will bring stability to the newly developing stems and leaves of the plant.



Where to Plant

Bulbs prefer full sun exposure once they have sprouted. Enrich the soil with organic material to improve its ability to hold moisture and slowly release nutrients. Level the site and make sure weeds have been removed. Be sure this site has good drainage so the bulbs won't rot in a wet soil location.

Choose Carefully

Bulbs need very little care once they are planted. Choose bulbs that grow well in your area. Think about the size of the flowers you want to see growing and the colors. Make sure the bulbs you buy are clean and have no visible defects like slices from being harvested, or soft spots. Choose plump, firm, large bulbs of their type; they usually produce more flowers than the small ones.

How to Plant

When you have chosen your bulbs, go over the planting area, laying a bulb down here and there, or scatter them gently over the area. Where they land is where you will plant them. All in a row is a very stiff, formal look. Scattered and mixed, large with small is a spontaneous, natural look. Arrange and rearrange until you like the way they will appear as they flower. Bulbs do well in groups.

Most bulbs need their bottom placed at two times their height. The depth of the hole will be more or less, depending on the girth and height of the actual bulb. Use a bulb planter (a round bottomless can with a handle) or use a small, narrow hand trowel to push down into the dampened soil and remove the correct amount of soil. Place the bulb in the hole with the pointed end up. Gently cover it with soil. Pat down lightly and top with more soil. The soil will settle during winter, but the bulb will also swell a bit as it sprouts.

After Planting

Sprinkle the top of the soil with low-nitrogen fertilizer and then a thick layer of compost. A layer of mulch will help keep down the weeds. Don't add bloodmeal or anything that will attract 'critters' to come and dig up the bulbs. Water well and keep an eye of the beds.

Once the bulbs bloom, remove the flower stalk but let the leaves die back naturally. The leaves make food for the bulb and fatten it up so it will go through winter and come up again in the spring to make more flowers. Once the leaves are totally dry or they start to fall off the top of the bulb, you may remove them.

Bulbs are not heavy feeders, but a light application of fertilizer once they are forming blooms will keep them looking healthy.

Many bulbs multiply and crowd the planting area. If you wish to move or divide your flowering bulbs, the safest time is when they enter their dormant period, right after the leaves die and fall off. Use a garden fork and lay the bulbs out in a shady place. Keep them cool and dry until you plant them again.

Planting Pointers

Allium. Bloom in the spring or summer. Thrive in full sun (six hours or more of direct sunlight a day) and tolerate partial shade. Like most bulbs, allium require well-drained soil.

Anemone. Best in full sun or partial shade. Prefers well-drained, enriched soil.

Crocus. Prefer full to partial sun. Most bloom before trees leaf and shade the garden; they can be planted under deciduous trees.

Daffodil. Thrive in full sun or filtered shade.

Galanthus. Also known as snowdrop, this small flower is one of the first to appear in spring. Grow in full sun or partial shade.

Hyacinth. Ideal for bedding. Be sure to wear gloves when planting, however; the bulbs may cause skin irritation. Prefer full sun.

Muscari. Known as grape hyacinth, these bulbs bloom in early spring. They thrive in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil.

Tulip. Bloom in the early spring. Plant in groups of at least five. Tulips thrive in full sun, but do well in partial shade. For the best bulb growth, "deadhead" the flowers by cutting them for indoor use or as soon as they fade.



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*Alameda County Master Gardeners (ACMGs) are adult volunteers of all ages and from all walks of life who want to help the diverse communities of Alameda County learn more about gardening. ACMGs are trained through the University of California and UC Cooperative Extension to extend research-based knowledge and information on home gardening issues. The Master Gardeners have two demonstration gardens in the county and offer a number of outreach programs to serve the public. For more information, visit our website at <http://acmg.ucdavis.edu/>*

### FREE TALKS

At 12 P.M. on the fourth Saturday of the month, Master Gardeners offer a series of free talks on timely gardening topics that will help home gardeners grow beautiful, productive gardens. The talks are held in our Trials Garden, Lakeside Park, 666 Bellevue Ave, Oakland. **October 22**, Meredith Kaplan will discuss "Choosing And Planting Great Landscape Plants."

What makes a great plant for our summer-dry gardens? What does "drought tolerant" mean in the plant world? Meredith will discuss our Master Gardener's list of "Outstanding Plants", many of which are showcased in our Trials Garden demonstration garden. We will also discuss their planting and watering needs. October is the perfect time to plant perennials for a fabulous garden next spring. We hope to see you there!