

Planting Spring Bulbs for Summer Color

Bulbs are an often overlooked addition to the garden, especially summer blooming bulbs. While fall is the best time to plant spring blooming bulbs, like tulips, spring is the time to think about your summer flower bed. Bulbs can create a low maintenance, vibrant, flower bed with blooms lasting most of the year!

The most important step in having success with bulbs is not unlike purchasing seeds or other plants—start with a high quality product. Cheaper bulbs are most often lower quality. Larger bulbs will be more expensive, but will produce more flowers. All bulbs should be free of mold or rotting tissue. If you pick up a bulb and your finger goes into the side of it's flesh, put it back! Domestic or imported bulbs can both be excellent choices, but you should get to know your supplier. Ordering from catalogs or local garden stores are both good choices.

Bulbs love sunshine and well-drained soils. 4-6 hours of sunshine will produce more flowers than placing bulbs in a shadier portion of your yard. If your soils stay wet for a substantial period of time, consider incorporating organic matter into the soil before planting any bulbs. Prone to rots, bulbs won't tolerate water-logged soils. To determine soil nutrients, a soil test should be performed the season prior to planting.

Summer blooming caladium, canna, lily of the valley, cyclamen, dahlia, gladiolus and tuberose can all be planted in the spring. Caladium shouldn't be planted until soil temperature reach 70 degrees F while cannas should be planted after the danger of frost has passed. Some spring planted bulbs, like gladiolus, tuberose, canna and caladium, should be dug up in the fall and replanted each year.

As a guide, bulbs should be planted at a depth equal to 3 times their width. If you're incorporating bulbs into an existing garden, individual holes can be dug for every bulb, or for small clusters of 3-5 bulbs. Incorporating bulbs with your other perennial and annual flowers can help you achieve a continuous bed of blooms throughout the seasons. For a more dramatic, brief, punch of color, consider digging your entire bed to the appropriate depth and planting many bulbs in one area. Mixing the types of bulbs you plant can prolong bloom time, but in general these bulbs will only last for the desired season such as spring or summer—depending on the type of bulb.

As long as your bulbs show leaves—water them! During times of flowering, special care should be taken to water at the base of the plant rather than overhead. Before and after flowering, when just leaves are visible, bulbs should be watered as you water your perennials. At least weekly if there is no adequate rainfall. Even after flowering, bulbs should remain in the landscape until their foliage dies. Although no more blooms will come, bulbs spend the remainder of the season building up nutrients for next year's blooms. A healthy, happy bulb will give you maximum flower power the next year!