

Fall Into Spring!



Welcome to the yoyo season (aka “fall”) here in Northeastern Oklahoma! Even though we had a slightly early frost followed by a return to summer temps, it is time to plan your spring gardens and that means getting your spring blooming flower bulbs now. There is still a broad selection of flowering bulbs available at your local garden center and online.

Crocus and hyacinth are the earliest bloomers. Snow crocus are hardy flowers that will bloom in late winter or early spring. Grape hyacinths, with their clusters of small grape-like blossoms, bloom about the same time.

The larger Dutch varieties of crocus and hyacinths will bloom a few weeks later. There are also a few varieties of early blooming tulips. Next up are the daffodils and more tulips. All are available in many colors and sizes. Allium, late variety tulips, and iris are the late spring bloomers.



Fall and early winter are the time to plant when soil temperatures are in the 50s. Current soil temps are in the upper 50s throughout Tulsa County which is perfect for root growth. And they should remain plenty warm for some time even if air temps drop to seasonal levels. Use a soil thermometer or check the Oklahoma Mesonet to be sure. They have weather stations throughout Oklahoma, and you can find them at <http://www.mesonet.org>.

Well-drained soil is important for all blooming bulbs. Bulbs will rot if they stay too wet. So, if your soil has a lot of clay, work in some organic material. Add compost or manure and work into your soil loosening that soil to about 12" deep. This will improve drainage and encourage better root growth. Be sure to avoid planting in areas where water will stand in winter or spring.

Flowering bulbs need sunlight. Early spring bloomers can be planted in areas that will be shaded later in the season. The later bloomers will need full sun so know they will not do as well under trees and shrubs.



Starting a new bulb bed is a great time to get a soil test. Complete instructions are available on our website which can be found at www.tulsamastergardeners.org. If you do not have time before planting this year, mix a little bone meal into your soil before planting to provide phosphorus. Phosphorus is the main element bulbs require. Once your bulbs sprout through the soil, fertilize with a small amount 10-10-10 but do NOT fertilize once they start to bloom. As for summer and fall flowering bulbs fertilize monthly until they start to bloom.

After the blooms have faded, allow the foliage to remain in place until it naturally fades. The fading greenery is providing energy back to the bulb so it can store it up for next year's growth. Most bulbs will bloom year after year. Tulips are the exception and are usually treated as annuals in our area, although you might get lucky and get a second season out of them.



Plant your bulbs according to size. Larger bulbs need to be planted deeper than smaller varieties. General rule of thumb is to plant them two to three times as deep as the bulb is tall. Plant them with the root end (the wide end) down and the sprouting end (the pointed end) up. Fall planted bulbs will put out roots before winter. Be sure to water them after planting - just enough to reach down to the bulbs. Do not over water!

Mulching your bulb bed will help them avoid freezing through the winter. Mulch will also help balance out water and temperature changes throughout the growing season. Be sure to include the mulch layer in your planting depth. *Exception:* do not mulch the earliest bloomers (crocus and grape hyacinth) because they rely on the sun to heat the soil and wake them, especially if there is snow on the ground.

Plant bulbs individually or in groups. They are great around perennials or as edging along walkways or driveways. Naturalize by planting small groups and individual bulbs in your yard. Smaller flowers are more impressive when planted in groups.

Gophers love bulbs, especially tulips. To discourage them, plant your bulbs together in a trench that is a little deeper than your normal planting depth. Line the bottom of the trench with chicken wire and put a layer of soil over the wire. Place your bulbs in the trench and add more soil. Cover with more chicken wire. Be sure the ends and edges of the wire come together so the gophers cannot get to your bulbs. Add more soil to cover completely.

Bulbs are a terrific addition to your garden. They will reward you with a beautiful spring next year and many years to come. You will be glad you did.

For more information visit our website which can be found at www.tulsamastergardeners.org. From the home page, choose the *Lawn and Garden Help* tab and click on *Flowers*. You will find information on bulb selection, planting, and some great videos, too.

Get answers to all your gardening questions by calling the Tulsa Master Gardeners Help Line at 918-746-3701, dropping by our Diagnostic Center at 4116 East 15th Street, or by emailing us at mg@tulsamastergardeners.org.

Sources:

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Missouri Botanical Garden

Tulsa World, "Ask A Master Gardener," Tom Ingram