

# GARDENING WITH BULBS

Amy Mullen  
Designer, Coach, Plant Geek

©Amy Mullen, 2024-25  
[amymullengardens.com](http://amymullengardens.com)

Throughout this presentation,  
underlined text denotes links.  
Click underlined text for more  
information.

Gardening with Bulbs  
© Amy Mullen 2024-25

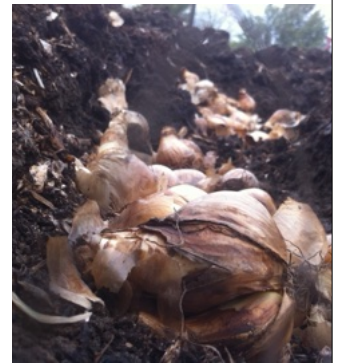
## Bulbs for all seasons!

- Hardy spring bulbs
  - Planted in the fall for spring bloom
  - (e.g. daffodil, tulip, and minor bulbs)
- Summer bulbs
  - Hardy (e.g. lily, crocosmia)
  - Tender (e.g. dahlia, gladiolus)
- Hardy fall bulbs
  - (e.g. cyclamen, autumn-blooming crocus)



## For the purposes of this talk...

- If it goes into the ground as a dried up blob, we're calling it a bulb.
- Although it may be a:
  - True bulb (e.g. lilies, tulips, alliums, hyacinth, and daffodils)
  - Corm (e.g. crocus, gladiolus)
  - Rhizome, tuber, etc.
  -



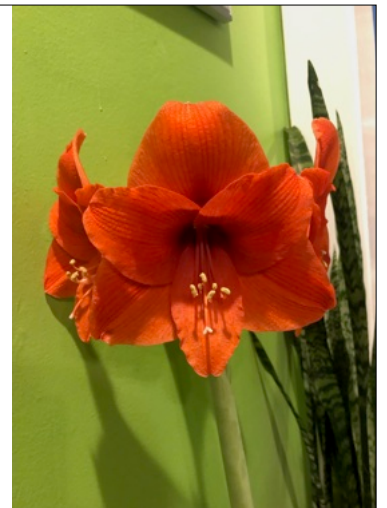
## Hardy vs Tender

- Hardy bulbs can survive the winter in ground; that's what we're focusing on today.
- Tender bulbs (like these dahlias) are either:
  - planted as annuals
  - dug out and stored through winter and then replanted in spring.



## Forcing Bulbs

- "Forcing" means to bring a plant into bloom out of season.
- Most hardy bulbs can be forced with chilling.
- Some tender bulbs can be forced without chilling them.
- *Amaryllis* and tender *Narcissus* (paperwhites), are used primarily for forcing.



## Designing with Bulbs

- Bulbs prefer well drained sites.
- Larger bulbs (daffodils, tulips, fritillary, allium, lilies) prefer full sun.
- Many of the minor bulbs are adaptable to sun and shade areas.
- Photo from Chicago Botanic Garden bulb garden.



## Places for Bulbs

### • Mixed or Perennial beds

- Choose small bulbs whose ripen foliage won't smother other plants.
- Larger bulbs are ok too, but avoid full-size daffodils.

### • Woodlands

- Minor bulbs, swathes of naturalizing daffodils, and fritillary.
- Choose bulbs that will naturalize; avoid deer and squirrel faves like tulips and crocus.



## Places for Bulbs

### • Meadows and Prairies

- Most prairies don't hit their stride until early summer, so add bulbs for early color.
- Good choices include minor bulbs and alliums, especially *Allium sphaerocephalon*.
- Avoid daffodils, which may naturalize more thickly than is desirable.



## Places for Bulbs

### • Lawns (stinzeplanten)

- Plant minor bulbs in a lawn and allow them to naturalize.
- Best in lawns that are sparsely seeded, preferably in part sun. Thick, aggressive turfgrasses muscle out these small bulbs.
- Can't mow the lawn until the bulb foliage has "ripened" (died back naturally).
- See [this link](#) for a list of appropriate bulbs for stinzeplanten.



## Tips for Working with Bulbs

- More is better!
- Do not plant bulbs in a single straight row.
- For a formal look, use lots of bulbs in a geometric pattern.
- You can use a template to help you plant.
- Bulbs planted in swathes look more natural.



## Tips for Working with Bulbs

- Most bulbs flower and die back before trees leaf out, so you can plant them in a shady area.
- Let the leaves turn brown (ripen) to ensure that the bulb has stored enough energy.
- Plant bulbs with later-emerging plants that will hide the ripening foliage.
- Especially hosta, daylily, and ornamental grasses.





## Ordering Bulbs

- Buy your bulbs online in August to be ready for October planting.
- My favorite sources are:
- [John Scheepers](#)
  - If ordering larger quantities, use the sister site, [Van Engelen](#).
- [Colorblends](#)
  - Particularly good for tulip mixes.



## Planting Spring Blooming Bulbs

- Plant after the first frost, usually mid-October.
- Plant bulbs through December, as long as the ground isn't frozen.
- Only plant firm bulbs. Toss squishy or moldy ones.
- Bulbs should be planted at a depth of 2 to 3 times their width, pointy end up.



## Planting with the Trench Method

- The fastest way to plant a lot of bulbs.
- Dig an S-shaped trench as deep as you need to plant the bulbs.
- Throw in some bulb food or bonemeal.
- Toss the bulbs in. Group some and let others trail away from the group.
- Back fill the trench.



## Pack Those Bulbs!

I learned this technique from *Mrs. Greenthumbs Plows Ahead*.

- Dig a big hole. Add some bulb food or bone meal.
- Plant 3 lily bulbs at 8" deep.
- Throw some soil over them.
- Plant 5 tulip bulbs over them at about 6" deep.
- Add more soil.
- Plant miniature daffodils at 2" deep
- Add more soil.
- Plant a late-summer blooming perennial, like a daylily, on top.

## Dividing Bulbs

- Divide if
  - bulbs start to develop a hole in the middle of the clump
  - bulbs aren't flowering.
- Mark the bulbs in spring.
- Dig, divide, and move as soon as they are finished blooming.

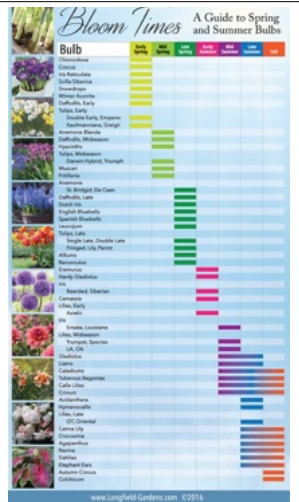


## Take Pictures!

- Taking pictures of your borders in the spring as a record.
- They help you make notes of where you'd like to add bulbs this fall.
- Marking the bulbs helps you avoid slicing them when you're digging in a garden bed.



- Chart from Longfield Gardens



- Based on EDDMapS from U. of Georgia Center for Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health

- Corydalis incisa, C. nobilis, C. solida (Fumeworts)
- Eranthis hymnalis (Winter aconite, shown)
- Galanthus nivalis (Common snowdrop)
- Hyacinthoides hispanica (Spanish bluebells)
- Muscari botryoides, M. neglectum (Grape hyacinth)
- Ornithogalum nutans, O. umbellatum (Star of Bethlehem)
- Scilla bifolia, S. luciliae, S. siberica (Squill)



- Greater snowdrop (*Galanthus elwesii*)\*

- Bloom January or February; plant in fall.
- Height: up to 12"
- Best locations:
  - shade and part-shade beds
  - woodlands
  - in meadows
- \*Avoid *G. nivalis*



- Crocus (*Crocus* spp.)
- White, yellow, and purple flowers.

- Plant in fall; bloom in very early spring (usually March).
- Height: up to 5"
- Plant lavishly; squirrels love them.
- Best locations
  - along pathways, near the edge of beds, under the lawn.
  - also great for forcing inside.
  - If planting in lawn, use the smaller species or botanical crocus, not the large Dutch crocus.



- Grape hyacinth (*Muscari* spp.)\*
- Tiny, blue or purple flowers in early spring.
- Grassy looking foliage.
- Plant lavishly in fall.

- More likely to bloom with the crocus than with the daffodils.
- Best locations:
  - under trees, especially with miniature daffodils.
  - scattered in mixed beds or ground covers.
- My faves: Muscari armeniacum
- \*Avoid *M. botryoides*, *M. neglectum*



- Rock garden iris, *Iris dandfordiae* and *I. reticulata*.

- Around 6" tall in brilliant yellows, blues, and purples.
- Bloom in early spring (usually March).
- Plant lavishly.
- Best locations:
  - in rock gardens or near a path.
  - also great for forcing.





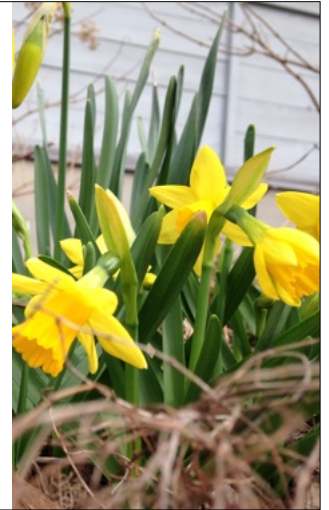
### Spring Bulbs: Daffodils

- *Narcissus* spp.
- Bloom in March and April; plant in fall.
- Choose some from early, mid-season, and late bloom groups to extend bloom time.
- Most will naturalize.
- Squirrel and deer resistant.
- The American Daffodil Society recognizes thirteen different divisions of daffodils.



### Spring Bulbs: Daffodil

- Miniature daffodils usually bloom the earliest.
- Best locations for miniature daffodils
  - great in meadows, ground covers, and under trees.
  - small enough to be planted in garden beds, too.
- My faves (mini)
  - Tete-a-Tete
  - Jetfire



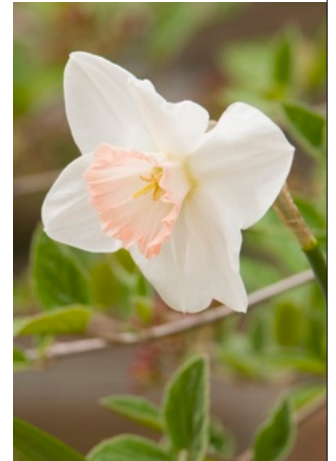
### Spring Bulbs: Daffodil

- Best locations for full-size daffodils:
  - woodlands and other spaces where they can naturalize,
  - in groundcover
  - in beds devoted to bulbs.
- Avoid full-size daffodils in beds; the dying foliage may smother other plants.
- Interplant with late emerging, sturdy perennials
  - e.g. hosta, grasses, or daylilies



### Spring Bulbs: Daffodils

- My faves (full size):
  - Rijnveld's Early Sensation (Early)
  - Arkley (Early)
  - Brackenhurst (Mid)
  - Fortissimo (Mid)
  - Ceylon (Mid)
  - Camelot (Late)
  - Mt. Hood (White)



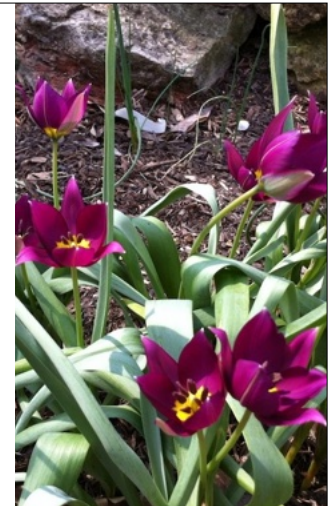
### Spring Bulbs: Botanical Tulips

- Smaller tulips, usually identified by species name.
- Bloom earlier than hybrid tulips; plant in fall.
- Height: up to 12", a few to 16"
- More likely to return than hybrids.
- Prefer full sun and need good drainage.



### Spring Bulbs: Botanical Tulips

- Best locations
  - rock gardens
  - meadows
  - along paths
  - stinze plantings (in lawn)
- My faves:
  - Tulipa humilis 'Persian Pearl'
  - Tulipa humilis 'Eastern Star'
  - Tulipa linifolia



### Spring Bulbs: Hybrid Tulips

- The big, showy tulips are hybrids.
- Bloom April and May; plant in fall.
- Usually must be replanted every year for good bloom.
- Choose some from early, mid-season, and late bloom groups to extend bloom time.
- Like candy to squirrels and deer.

#### Best Locations:

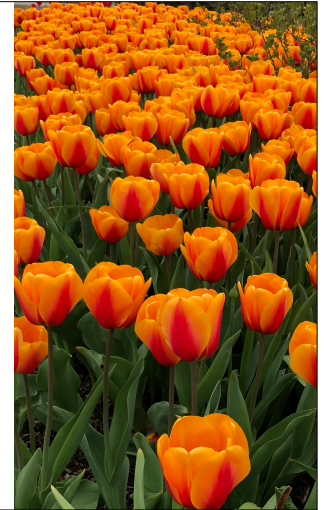
- In full sun and well-drained soil.
- beds devoted to bulbs and annuals or cutting beds
- mixed plantings.



### Spring Bulbs: Hybrid Tulips

#### My faves:

- Queen of the Night (Single late, V. dark purple)
- Purple Prince (Single early, purple)
- Negrita (Single late, purple)
- Bastogne (Triumph, red)
- Kingsblood (Single late, red)
- American Dream (Darwin, orange-yellow, shown)
- Flair (Single early, orange-yellow)
- Barcelona (Triumph, fuschia)
- Sunny Prince (Single early, yellow)



### Spring Bulbs: Fritillaria

- Members of the lily family.
- Plant in fall; bloom in April.
- My fave: Fritillaria meleagris, the checkered lily (top).
- Best in part shade and moist but well-drained soil.
- For something truly weird, consider Crown Imperials (F. imperialis, bottom). But sniff before you buy!
- Prefer sun but tolerate woodland conditions.



### Late Spring Bulb: Ornamental Onions (*Allium* spp.)

- Bloom late, in May or early June; plant in fall.
- Several different heights; look like puffballs on a stick.
- Squirrels don't eat them.
- Mostly blue or purple; some are yellow and white.
- Best locations: with grasses, in cottage plantings, or in traditional English border.
- My faves: Allium 'Purple Sensation' (globe); Allium sphaerocephalon (drumstick)



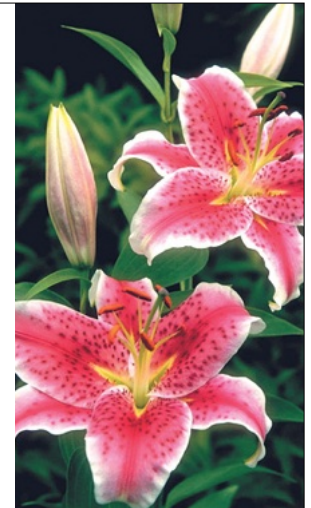
### Summer Bulb: Asiatic Lily (*Lilium* spp.)

- Bloom June into July; **plant bulbs after frost in spring.**
- Upright with leaves that just out from the stem.
- Generally not fragrant.
- Asiatic lilies have a wide range of bloom colors: red, orange, yellow, purple, pink.
- Multiply rapidly.
- Best locations:
  - mixed border in full sun (only showy when in bloom)



### Summer Bulb: Oriental Lily (*Lilium* spp.)

- Bloom midsummer after the Asiatic lilies; **plant bulbs after frost in spring.**
- The big, fragrant lilies sold in florists shops.
- In fewer colors than Asian lilies, mostly white, pink, red.
- Avoid very hot locations. Give them full sun with some afternoon shade.
- The pollen stains, so pinch off the stamens.
- Best locations:
  - mixed border in full sun (only showy when in bloom)





## Summer Bulb: Montbretia (Crocosmia spp.)

- Late summer perennial.
- Can be planted as bulb in fall or in late spring after frost or as transplant.
- Sword-shaped foliage.
- Full sun to part shade in well drained soil.
- Drought tolerant when established but does better with some moisture.
- Plant in mixed or perennial border, with grasses, or to add tropical flair.
- My fave: 'Lucifer'



## Fall Bulb: Autumn Crocus\*

- *Colchicum autumnale* is also called meadow saffron
- Other *Colchicums* are called
  - autumn crocus (not actually crocus).
  - naked ladies (because they bloom before leaves emerge).
- Bloom in September and October.  
**Plant in late summer to early fall.**
- Full sun to light shade in well-drained soil.
- Best Locations
  - Plant with early spring bloomers, in a woodland with ferns and hostas, or as underplanting to fall perennials.
- \* **Highly toxic, even fatal if swallowed.**



## Fall Bulb: Hardy Cyclamen

- *Cyclamen hederifolium* (Ivy-leaved cyclamen, sowbread) and others.
- Bloom September to October; **plant corms just below the surface in late summer or early fall.**
- Hardy to zones 5 to 9, so don't confuse it with the florist kind.
- Deer-resistant.
- Prefers part shade and dry to medium, well-drained soil, but can handle dry shade.
- Best Locations
  - Areas that don't get deluged with rain, like woodlands or under shrubs.
  - Rock gardens.
  - Planted among part-shade groundcover.



## Thanks!

Gardening with Bulbs  
© Amy Mullen 2024

Email: [amy@amymullengardens.com](mailto:amy@amymullengardens.com)

Website: [amymullengardens.com](http://amymullengardens.com)

Facebook: [@amymullengardens](https://www.facebook.com/amymullengardens)

Instagram: [@amymullengardens](https://www.instagram.com/amymullengardens)

Pinterest: [amymullengardens](https://www.pinterest.com/amymullengardens)

Photos by Amy Mullen except:

*Bloom Chart*: Longfield Gardens

*Crococsmia*: Ssciro20, Public Domain

*Cochichum*: Stemonitis, Public Domain

*Cyclamen*: Dominicus Johannes Bergsma, [CC BY-SA 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/) via Wikimedia Commons

