



BULB PLANTING

Choosing a Site

There are two key considerations when choosing a site for bulbs. 1: Sunlight. Most bulbs need ample sunshine to bloom well next spring and to store up the energy required to flower in future springs. Some bulbs — including crocuses and scillas — can be planted beneath deciduous trees; these bulbs are able to satisfy most of their light needs before the trees leaf out. 2: Drainage. All bulbs need good drainage; never plant bulbs where water collects. The drainage of heavy clay soils can be improved by digging in organic matter such as compost or composted manure.

When to Plant

Bulbs should be planted when the soil has cooled to about 55 degrees F. Bulbs need cool soil to make roots before the onset of winter. You have about 8 weeks to plant after the first frost. As long as the ground is not frozen, you can still plant bulbs. For us, this is usually no earlier than the last week of October/first week of November.

Planting

There are two principal ways of planting bulbs. 1: Planting a bed. Excavate the area to be planted and loosen the soil in the bottom. Set the bulbs in the bed. Replace the soil (gently at first, to avoid knocking the bulbs out of position). If the soil is dry, water thoroughly. 2: Planting bulbs individually. Dig a hole with a trowel, auger or bulb planter. Drop the bulb (or bulbs — small bulbs such as scilla can be planted in threes, fours or more) into the hole. Replace the soil. If the soil is dry, water thoroughly after planting. Note: Don't worry too much about which end is up on a bulb. Bulbs know to send shoots up and roots down. They will grow and bloom even if you plant them upside down.

Fertilizing

The bulbs already have next year's flowers set inside them, so there's no need to fertilize at planting time. If you intend for your bulbs to be long-term players in your landscape, you may want to fertilize them in early spring, when the shoots begin to push through the soil. It is advisable to have your soil tested first to identify any nutrient deficiencies and that you correct those deficiencies with an organic fertilizer, which will release nutrients slowly. Most bulbs are not heavy feeders. You can generally do without fertilizer entirely if you mulch your bulbs annually with 1-2 inches of an organic material such as compost, shredded bark, aged wood chips or shredded leaves.

Caring for Your Bulbs After They Bloom

After your bulbs bloom, you may remove the spent flowers or seed heads if they are unsightly. Do NOT cut the leaves. You must allow the foliage to die back naturally (spring-flowering bulbs go dormant in summer, reappearing the following spring). If you cut, braid or tie up the foliage before it yellows and withers, you prevent the bulbs from storing up the energy they will need to grow and bloom again the following year.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR SPECIFIC BULBS

Allium

Plant in full sun or light shade and well-drained soil. Sandy soil is ideal. Allium leaves begin to yellow by the time the flowers open. You can disguise the foliage by planting large alliums behind or among perennials or shrubs, and small alliums in a loose ground cover. The flower heads remain attractive for a time even after the color drains away. They can be left in the garden or cut and dried for use in indoor arrangements



Mt. Everest- 7" deep, 5" apart

Purple Sensation- 5" deep, 4" apart

Globemaster, Gladiator - 7-8" deep, 5" apart

Low-growing allium mixture- 3-4" deep, 3" apart



Snowdrops (Galanthus)

Snowdrops don't like to be out of the ground so plant as soon as possible. Best planted in groups of at least 7 bulbs. They bloom very early and will multiply over time.

Plant- 4" deep and 2" to 4" apart.

Hyacinths

Plant 5" deep and 5" apart

They need at least a half day of sun to flower well and store up enough energy for the following spring's display. They grow in any well-drained soil. The flower heads are at their largest and fullest the first spring after planting; in subsequent years the flowers tend to be more loose and informal. They can be forced for indoor bloom.



Forcing

Forcing Cold-Hardy Bulbs: Many spring-flowering bulbs can be tricked or "forced" to bloom indoors in winter, providing color and fragrance when few plants are stirring outdoors. "Rooting time" refers to the amount of time during which cold-hardy bulbs must be kept cold (about 40 degrees F) and moist before they can be brought into bloom.

Bulb vases: Fill your bulb vase with water just below the bulb making sure the base of the bulb stays above water level. If it sits in water, the bulb will rot. Then place the container in a dark, cool area (40-50°F) for 4-8 weeks. Check the water level occasionally and add more water as necessary, keeping the water level below the bottom of the bulb. When roots have developed and leaves begin to grow, it is time to move the bulb into a bright window in a cool room (one where the temperatures stay below 65°F). Most bulbs will bloom 2-5 weeks after they come out of the cold, heralding spring with their bright colors and sweet fragrances.

Containers and potting mix: You can use any pot you like to hold bulbs for forcing, as long as it allows room for root growth -- about 3-4in of space below the bulbs. If you choose a pot without a drainage hole in the bottom, you'll have to water your bulbs very carefully; bulbs sitting in soggy potting mix soon rot. We recommend that you force bulbs in a soilless potting mix (available at garden centers and hardware stores). A soilless mix holds moisture but allows excess water to drain away readily.

Potting the bulbs: To pot the bulbs, begin by placing potting mix in a plastic tub or bucket. Slowly add water and stir until the mix is moist but not soggy. Add moistened mix to the container until the container is about 1/2 full. Set the bulbs with the flat side down on top of the mix. Space the bulbs much more closely than you would in the garden; they should almost touch. Then add more mix to cover the bulbs. Cover the bulbs up to their necks, leaving the tips of the bulbs exposed. Water thoroughly after potting.

Chilling the bulbs: To force cold-hardy bulbs into bloom, you must first encourage them to produce new roots by keeping them cold and moist for a period of time that varies by type of bulb (12-14 weeks for Hyacinths). The ideal rooting temperature also varies, but most bulbs flower best if stored at 40-60 degrees F for the first 3-4 weeks after potting, then at 32-40 degrees F for the balance of the cooling period -- a shift that mimics the drop in soil temperature outdoors as fall turns to winter.

You can also chill bulbs in a cold basement, an unheated garage (provided the temperature doesn't fall below freezing), or a refrigerator. In such locations, it may be difficult to arrange for the shift in temperature described above, but most bulbs will root properly if the temperature does not stray too far above or below 40 degrees F during the rooting time.

If rodents have access to your bulbs, they may devour them, so protect potted bulbs with steel mesh or another barrier that still allows air circulation.

Please note that moisture is as important as temperature in the successful chilling of bulbs. Check the potting mix in the pots every few weeks and water thoroughly when the surface of the mix is dry to the touch.

Toward the end of the recommended rooting time, begin checking the pots for signs that the bulbs have rooted. If you see fleshy white roots poking through the drainage holes in the bottom of the pots, the bulbs are usually ready to bloom. If you don't see roots, give the bulbs more time in cold storage. Don't judge readiness by the appearance of shoots from the tops of the bulbs; without roots, the bulbs won't flower properly.

Once the bulbs have rooted, you don't have to bring them out of the cold immediately. Most tolerate extra chilling time, allowing you to orchestrate a succession of winter bloom.

Bringing the bulbs into bloom: When the bulbs have rooted, bring the pots out of cold storage and set them in a bright window in a cool room (one where the temperature stays below 65 degrees F). Bright light will help keep the leaves and flower stems compact; in weak light, they tend to flop. You are likely to find that the bulbs have produced white shoots during cold storage. Sunlight quickly turns them green.

Keep a close eye on the moisture needs of the bulbs as they send up leaves and flower stems. Initially, the bulbs probably won't need to be watered more often than once a week (if that much), but by the time they bloom, you may need to water them every day or two.

Most bulbs will bloom 2-5 weeks after they come out of the cold, heralding spring with their bright colors and sweet fragrances. Duration of bloom varies with the type of bulb and the variety but is generally shorter than you'd expect of bulbs in the garden. Warm temperatures and low humidity indoors speed the decline of the flowers. Keeping the pots out of direct sunlight and moving them to a cool room at night helps prolong bloom.

When the blooms fade, we recommend that you toss the bulbs on the compost pile. If you keep them in a sunny window and continue to water them, forced bulbs can be planted in the garden after the threat of hard frost has passed, but they won't bloom well again for at least 2 years.

Forcing Hyacinths without soil: Hyacinth bulbs can be forced in pebbles and water, or in glass jars. They still require a cool rooting period if forced this way. Special forcing glasses, in use since Victorian days, are shaped like an hourglass and keep the bottom of the bulb dry -- only the bulb's roots reach down into the water. Place the forcing glass or container with the bulb in a dark, cool area (under 50 degrees F) for 4-8 weeks. Check the water level occasionally and add more water as necessary, keeping the water level below the bottom of the bulb. When roots have developed and the leaves begin to grow, it is time to move the bulb into a bright window in a cool room (one where the temperature stays below 65 degrees F). Bulbs forced in water can be planted in the garden after the threat of hard frost has passed, but they won't bloom well again for at least 2 years.



Leucojum- Plant 6” deep and 5” apart

Full sun or partial shade and soil that does not dry out entirely in summer. In the wild, snowflakes are found in damp meadows and on riverbanks, so they are a good choice for a spot where the soil is less than perfectly drained. Bulbs are slow to go dormant in summer; wait to cut back until the leaves have yellowed.

Narcissus

To get the most from daffodils, follow these 4 basic rules: 1: Plant them where they will get at least 6 hours of direct sunlight, even after they have finished flowering and the trees have leafed out. Daffodils need lots of sun after they bloom to produce next year’s flowers. 2: Plant them in soil that drains well. Avoid areas where water stands after a rainstorm. 3: Fertilize very lightly with a low-nitrogen fertilizer, preferably organic, just as the shoots emerge from the ground in early spring. 4: After daffodils flower, wait at least 8 weeks — until the leaves turn yellow — before cutting them. Never tie or braid daffodil foliage.



This year’s leaves = next year’s flowers. If you want to naturalize daffodils (i.e., plant them so that they look as though they had sprung up on their own), we suggest that you set them out in drifts (not in blocks or lines) and that you space them farther apart than recommended on the bag label (to allow room for the clumps to increase in size). If you want to naturalize daffodils in a grassy area, you must wait to mow until their foliage has begun to turn yellow, which means allowing the grass to grow very tall. Note: Daffodil flowers face the prevailing direction of the light they receive. If you plant them in an open location that is viewed from the north, they will look away from you.



Scilla – Plant 3” deep and 3” apart

Full sun or partial shade. Well-drained soil. Blue squill can self-sow with abandon: If left undisturbed, a handful of bulbs may eventually become a thick, brilliant blue carpet in spring. Can be naturalized in a lawn if you’re willing to hold off on mowing until the seed capsules open and the foliage begins to yellow.

INDOOR BULBS

Amaryllis

Plant each bulb in a 6- or 7-inch pot (bulbs may also be clustered in a larger pot). A terra-cotta pot is a good choice because it helps to counterbalance the weight of the flowers. Use any commercial potting mix (available at garden centers and home stores). Plant so that the top one-third to one-half of the bulb is ABOVE the level of the potting mix. Water thoroughly after planting and set the pot in a sunny window (south- or west-facing is best). Room temperature (60°–75°F) is ideal — the warmer the room the faster the bulb will grow. Water sparingly until growth is clearly under way, then water thoroughly whenever the surface of the potting mix is dry to the touch. Turn the pot daily to promote balanced growth (the stems will lean toward the window). In the average home, flowers will appear 8–12 weeks after planting. Bloom can be prolonged by moving the bulb to a cool location at night.



If you want your amaryllis to flower again the following year, cut each flower stem off 2 inches above the top of the bulb after the blooms fade. Do NOT cut the leaves. Continue to water as needed and begin fertilizing monthly with a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer (mixed as directed). After the danger of frost has passed in spring, set the pot outdoors in a shady location. Over the course of a week or so, gradually increase the bulb's exposure to sunlight. The bulb needs lots of sun (ideally more than six hours a day in northern regions) to store up the energy it needs to flower. The bulb can be left in its pot, moved to a larger pot or planted (at the same level) in the ground. Continue to water and fertilize the bulb through summer. In late summer or fall (some gardeners wait until after the first frost), bring the pot indoors (or lift the bulb from the soil) and place it in a cool (50°F is ideal), dry location such as a basement for 8–10 weeks. Then pot the bulb (if necessary) as directed above and put it in a sunny window.

Paperwhites

Any sort of pot or bowl can be used, as long as it is at least 3 inches deep. The bulbs can be potted in a commercial potting mix (available at garden centers and home stores) or pebbles (if you use pebbles, choose a pot or bowl that does not have a drainage hole in the bottom; a clear container allows you to see the water level). Fill the container with potting mix or pebbles to within 2 inches of the rim. Set the bulbs very closely (it's OK if they touch).

Cover with additional potting mix or pebbles, leaving just the necks exposed. Water thoroughly. If you use a container that does not have a drainage hole, water with care: The water level should be just below the bottoms of the bulbs. If the bulbs sit in water, they may rot. Place the container in a cool (50°F is ideal) place such as a closet or basement. Cool temperatures stimulate root growth. If you don't have a cool location, set the container on the floor away from radiators or heat vents. Check the bulbs frequently but water very sparingly until shoots emerge from the bulbs.



When the bulbs are firmly rooted and growth begins to show (about 2 weeks after potting), move the container to a sunny window. Water as needed and rotate the container daily to promote balanced growth (the leaves and stems will lean toward the light). If the plants grow tall and look as though they may topple, support them with twine and stakes. Florist's wire can also be used. Paperwhites generally bloom 5–6 weeks after planting. You can stagger plantings to keep the color and fragrance coming. Store unplanted bulbs in a cool (but not freezing) location. Paperwhites are frost tender, and it's difficult to get them to flower well again indoors and are best composted.