



Flower Bulbs to Plant in

AUTUMN



Flower Bulbs to Plant in Autumn

One of the most exciting and fun gardening tasks to look forward to in autumn is planting spring-flowering bulbs. Why do we plant spring-flowering bulbs in the fall? Many bulbs such as crocus, snowdrops, and muscari require a period of cold to initiate flowering. The cold months of winter provide that opportunity for the bulbs to ready themselves to put on a show. Why not get a start on the upcoming spring and incorporate some early bloomers in your garden?



Where to Plant Your Bulbs

You can dedicate the front of your garden beds to beautiful mass displays of spring-flowering bulbs. They can be planted beneath tree and shrubs or mixed in with herbaceous perennials. Some gardeners choose to grow small varieties such as crocus and muscari in the lawn, where the blooms make a colourful statement in early spring and the foliage blends in with the turf grass later in the season. Bulbs can also be tucked into raised beds and in-ground vegetable gardens, where they will provide early spring food for pollinators. A sunny spot is a must for top-notch blooms.

Selecting Bulbs

You can get pre-packaged bulbs, or buy individual bulbs in bulk (which is great if you want to mix and match). They are available at most garden centres, some big box stores, and online.

Make sure the bulbs are free of any blemishes, cuts, or other damage. They should be plump, not dry. There should be no signs of mould.

Planting Time

Spring-flowering bulbs are usually planted in late September or any time in October on the Prairies. Using a trowel or a special tool called a bulb planter, dig a hole twice as deep as the size of the bulb. You don't want to plant bulbs too deeply as they will not perform their best. Plant in clumps to achieve a show-stopping vignette.

Make sure the planting area has sufficient drainage – you don't want to drown your bulbs in consistently soggy soils. If your soil is comprised of heavy clay, add organic matter such as compost to amend the texture as well as add nutrients.

Fertilizer

When planting bulbs in the fall, you can throw in a pinch of bone meal into the planting hole. If your soil is depleted of nutrients, side dressing your flowers with a layer of an inch of compost is a good idea.

Mulching

Especially in areas that are prone to Chinooks and do not have adequate snow cover in the winter, mulching your bulbs with dry leaves or clean straw is a good idea, as it will help keep them from breaking dormancy too early.

Thwart the Squirrels

Squirrels love to dig up and munch on your freshly-planted bulbs – it's almost as if they watch you plant them, then go out and undo your handiwork. Sprinkling bloodmeal over the soil after planting may scare them off. Tacking down mesh netting into the soil over top of the bulbs using landscape pegs is another good solution. The netting may be lifted in the early spring when you see the first signs of green.



Choosing the Right Bulbs

Scilla (squill) – Delicate in appearance but tough-as-nails, with tiny blue and white flowers. Plant them in large groups.

Chionodoxa (snow glories) – Star-shaped bright blue blooms with glowing white centres. Mass groupings are necessary as individual plants are so small.

Muscari (grape hyacinth) - Regular hyacinths don't fare very well in cold climates, but these beauties with the grape-like clusters of flowers in dark blue or purple, pink, yellow, red, and white stand out when planted in drifts.

Daffodils – Yellow is, of course, the most common colour, but daffodils also come in white, pink, and orange. There are miniature varieties and doubles, as well.

Tulips – Tulips come in every colour imaginable, even green and black! There are tulips with frilly edges, such as parrot types. The species tulips (which are small and not as showy) often fare better than some of the cultivated ones in colder climates.

Crocus – Many people consider spring to have officially arrived when they see crocus flowers appear. These cultivated types have purple, yellow, or white blooms and are commonly sold as mixed sets. There are some so-called giant types with large blooms.

Fritillaria (chequered lilies) – These unusual spotted bell-shaped flowers may be yellow, orange, red, and purple, and make a huge statement in mixed plantings.

Snowdrops – Small, delicate bell-shaped flowers dangle from the stems of these diminutive plants. Most are pure white, as befitting the common name, but many have green centres. There are some light blue types, and a few double varieties.

Alliums – These ornamental members of the onion family have blooms in a myriad of colours, including white, pink, yellow, green, and purple. Some have tightly-clustered flowerheads, while others look like bold fireworks. There are giant varieties, as well, with tall stems and huge blooms the size of dinnerplates.

Garlic

A special fall-planted bulb specifically meant for the edible garden is garlic. Hardneck varieties are planted in October for harvest the following summer or early fall (usually around August or September). Plant individual garlic cloves into compost-amended soil, either in a raised bed or in-ground. Space the cloves 10 to 15 centimetres (4 to 6 inches) apart, and plant them at a depth of approximately 5 centimetres (2 inches). Make sure they are sited in a sunny spot. Label the rows so you don't forget where the cloves are in the spring!

Garlic should be mulched over the winter with a layer (about 5 centimetres or 2 inches) of clean straw. The mulch should be pulled back once the plants emerge in the spring.

There are countless garlic varieties to try, ranging from the mildly-flavoured to hot and spicy; experiment with a few to see which ones are your favourites.



