

It's time to plant spring bulbs

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Autumn is a great time to plant your spring flowers. The weather is getting cooler, making garden chores more pleasant. And, many spring-flowering plants need to spend the winter in the garden to give good results in the spring.

If you want spring-flowering bulbs in your landscape, they need to be planted now, in the fall. If planted in November or December, these bulbs will usually start flowering in late February and continue into May. The splash of color in early spring is certainly worth some effort now.

Of the spring flowering bulbs suitable for our climate, some of the easiest to grow belong to the narcissus family that includes daffodils and jonquils. If properly selected and planted, they will faithfully come back year after year. Naturalized plantings that have been found in fields and woods around old home sites date back over a century. They have survived and multiplied with no human care or intervention.

There are a number of cultivars of daffodils that will do very well in this area:

- 'Carlton',
- 'Ice Follies',
- 'Fortune', 'Trevethian',
- 'Thalia', and
- 'Cragford'

are a few of the most reliable. The late John van Beck, past president and founder of the Florida Daffodil Society considered '**Carlton**' to be the workhorse of daffodils in our area and suggested that if you have room for only one variety, plant 'Carlton'.

What about tulips? Yes you can grow tulips and hyacinths here, but they require a little fooling with Mother Nature and even then, they will probably not bloom after the first season. For best flowering these bulbs require a period with temperatures much lower than we normally get in Tallahassee. The gardener can simulate this climatic condition by storing the bulbs in a refrigerator for eight to ten weeks before planting. To save you some time and effort several local nurseries sell preconditioned bulbs. (*Note: Daffodil bulbs should not be refrigerated.*)

Don't be deterred from planting tulips, just treat them as annuals. Their radiant display of color next spring will make the extra effort worthwhile.

Most bulbs, and particularly daffodils and tulips, like sun. So pick a site that gets at least six hours of full sun or very light shade all day. Daffodils need sun in order to bloom. The daffodil flowers will always face the sun. So, if you want to fully enjoy the blooms, be sure you plant in a spot where the sun will be behind you are viewing the flowers.

Choose a site that is well drained. Bulbs will rot in a soil that tends to stay wet. Loosen the soil thoroughly. The bulbs will do best if the whole planting bed is tilled before planting. If you just dig a hole and drop in a bulb, the roots may not develop well. Plant the bulbs at a depth of about twice their length. This is the general

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practice in this climate zone, as opposed to what you may read in the catalogs for northern climates.

Space the large bulbs about six to eight inches apart or about four bulbs per square foot. Smaller bulbs can be spaced a little closer but do not overcrowd them. Do not put fertilizer in the hole but fertilize on the surface after planting. Mulch with pine straw or leaves. Water whenever there is less than one-half inch of rain per week. Do not over-water.

Fertilize every autumn. Plant your bulbs as soon as possible after you buy them to prevent drying. Do not let them sit in the sun while planting.

Resist the urge to cut back the leaves after the flowering is over. Let them die back naturally; they feed the bulb and provide for the following year's flowers. Use a cover planting to hide the yellowing leaves or cover with pine straw.

Have a colorful spring. Plant your flowering bulbs now.

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