



**Ahh – To Grow A Garden – So Get Up and Get Growing –Taylorsville City - Tree Of The Month Article – September 2009 - Planting Spring Bulbs - For reference Taylorsville City is USDA Hardiness zone 7A.** "A hut, a tree, a hill, and a piece of meadow for me, I'll ask no other thing, Of God or king." - Max Eastman (1883-1969). A portion of this article was taken from the Garden Helper Your Free Internet Guide to Gardening at [www.thegardenhelper.com](http://www.thegardenhelper.com)

There is nothing quite as beautiful as seeing your spring flowering bulbs burst into color after the long cold winter. You can add beauty and color almost anywhere in your landscape with a little time, planning and effort this fall. As a general rule, the colder your climate, the earlier you plant. In colder northern climates, plant spring bulbs in September, October, or early November. The only universal rule is that, spring flowering bulbs must be planted before the first hard frost. Spring bulbs need a couple of months of chilling time (below 40 degrees F.) to produce their spring flower spikes, which is why it is necessary to plant them in the fall. Gardeners in United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) Hardiness Zones 6 to 7 should wait until the temperatures start to dip in October and can continue until early November.

Lots of folks refer to any underground structure that isn't a fibrous or conical root system as a "bulb." But in actuality, bulbs are very specific things, and shouldn't be confused with rhizomes, corns, or tubers. Amaryllis, Daffodils, Hyacinths, Lilies, Tulips, Snowdrops, and Ornamental Onions are all true bulbs. When shopping for bulbs, avoid any that appear moldy, mushy, or seem otherwise rotted. Loose skins aren't a problem. There are three basic planting techniques for bulbs.

**Layering** means planting one bulb directly on top of another. For instance, a Tulip or Daffodil bulb can be planted 6 to 8 inches deep, covered with at least an inch or two of soil, and an earlier flowering bulb like a Crocus, can be added right on top of it. Some gardeners say you have three or four layers of bulbs in the ground. The Crocus will surface and bloom first, and the Tulip or Daffodil will follow, providing a longer season of color from the exact same spot.

**Naturalizing** is by far the most fun planting method, but it's not for everyone. It involves putting your bulbs in a bag (or in a closed fist) tossing them in the air and planting them where they land. If you want to naturalize bulbs in grass, you MUST allow the bulb foliage to yellow and collapse before you mow. If you cut too soon, you will prevent the bulbs from storing up the energy they need to flower the following spring. The grass will grow tall and the area will look a little rough after the first spring mowing, but the grass will quickly green up and fill in. Many spring flowering bulbs are ideal for naturalizing in lawns. Crocus, Iris, Grape Hyacinth, Daffodils and Bluebells can be grown right in the lawn. Choose an area where the grass can be left un-mowed until the foliage has matured. I have planted about 2,000 Crocuses in my own front lawn, with about 200 Tulips planted on the edges of the lawn. They really do put on a very colorful display then I mow right over them a little later in the spring.

Foliage should not be mowed off until it turns yellow and dies back naturally. The foliage on the smaller bulbs such as Snowdrops and Sequills will die back rapidly and cause little problem. The foliage on the larger bulbs like tulips and daffodils will take several weeks to die back. Keep in mind that after flowering, the plant needs the green leaves to manufacture food (photosynthesis) that is stored in the bulb for next year's growth. If the homeowner mows off the foliage early, the plant can no longer manufacture nutrient reserves for next year. This results in a small, weak bulb which will gradually decline and die out.

Hillsides and the perimeter of wooded areas are also excellent areas for naturalizing. You grab a whole bunch of bulbs in your hands and you scatter them. Wherever they land, that's where you plant them. Planting is then done by removing a small section of sod, using a large steel bar to punch a hole in through the sod, or a long nosed trench digging shovel is perfect, and then prepare the hole for the bulb. Loosen the soil within the hole, and then add a mixture of sand and peat moss, along with about a tablespoon of granular bulb fertilizer, mix well, set the bulbs in place at the proper depth and cover the bulbs with soil then replace the piece of sod. Naturalized bulbs can be left undisturbed for many years.

**The third method**, to which I'm partial, involves planting bulbs in order of their appearances in your flower beds, early arrivals in the rear, late bloomers up front. This way, spent blooms and foliage are hidden behind the newer entries. As long as leaves are green, they're busy producing food for next year's flowers. For this reason, it's important to leave





them in place until they've completely yellowed and withered. Generally, the earliest flowers which open will be the Crocus and Snowdrops followed by Daffodils and Tulips. Before the spring bulb season is over, the Dutch Iris and Spanish Bluebells will grace your garden. Within each of these bulbs, and all spring blooming bulbs, you will find a multitude of bulbs which bloom at different times (i.e. early, mid or late blooming bulbs). Using early, mid and late blooming bulbs will spread out the bloom time for each type of bulb group, and you can enjoy much longer bloom time if you use different bulbs. Check the plant height on the package, and plant low-growing bulbs in front of taller ones, based on where you will be viewing them the most often.

Think about your color scheme, contrasting colors make a great display, or you may want to use many hues of the same color. Using whites or yellows will brighten even the plainest corner of the garden. The most popular method is that of massed garden plantings, where several groupings (of at least 5 bulbs each) are planted together. Many gardeners consider it a 'no-no' to plant bulbs in single straight lines, however others feel that there are places and situations where this is quite appropriate. Some gardeners use a 'modified' straight line (double line), offsetting the next bulb by an inch or two. This gives the 'line' a little more stability against winds and a little less uniformity. There are several ways to divert attention from the yellowing bulb foliage. Interplant the bulbs in the spring using one or two colors of annuals. One of the visual problems with spring bulbs is the foliage that remains after bloom. The foliage can become unsightly if the bulbs are planted in a public area of the landscape. Place bulbs behind the plants on the front edge of a border planting. Plant taller flowering bulbs behind lower growing foreground shrubs. Plant bulbs with groundcovers and perennials like hostas or daylilies.

Bulbs provide a good investment for money spent and supply years of spring color in your yard. Fall is the prime time for planting hardy spring flowering bulbs. Most bulbs can be planted until the ground is frozen. The general rule of thumb for planting spring bulbs is to plant two to three times as deep as the bulb is tall. This means most large bulbs like tulips or daffodils will be planted about 6 to 8 inches deep while smaller bulbs will be planted 3 to 4 inches deep. Planting depth is measured from the bottom of the bulb. This rule of thumb on planting depth does not apply to summer bulbs, which have varied planting requirements. For planting depth of summer bulbs, consult the information supplied with the bulbs. Tulips, Daffodils and Hyacinths should be planted with the nose of the bulb upward and the root plate downward. The best method of planting is to dig and loosen the entire bed to the proper depth. Press the bulbs into the soil in the planting area and cover with soil.

Regardless of the spring bulb planting method, remember to choose healthy bulbs. Avoid bulbs that are dry and withered, spongy or moldy. In general, the larger the bulb for its type, the more flowers it will produce. Choose an appropriate location. Most flowering bulbs prefer full sun, but that can be planted almost anywhere in the spring, before the trees leaf out. So don't overlook a spot that seems perfect, just because it's a bit shady in the fall. Woodland bulbs like Anemone, Jack-in-the-Pulpit, Dog's Tooth Violets, Snowdrops and Trillium prefer a bit of cool shade. A well-drained soil will prevent the bulbs from rotting in cool weather. You can plant bulbs as long as the soil is soft enough to dig a hole. However, they will have more time to begin growing roots if planted before mid-November.

Mix some bone meal or super phosphate into the soil at the bottom of the hole at planting time, to encourage strong root growth. You could mix in some water soluble fertilizer as well, but it's not necessary if you've already amended your soil. If rodents tend to eat your bulbs, you can try sprinkling some red pepper in the planting hole. To discourage squirrels, rabbits, moles and other bulb-hoarding critters from making a winter meal of your spring garden, add a handful of crushed oyster shells to the hole when planting bulbs. The pests find the texture of the shells irritating and will keep away, plus you get the added bonus of nutrients leeching from the shells will nourish your bulbs. A more secure method is to plant your bulbs in a cage made of hardware cloth. The roots and stems grow through, but the rodents can't get to the bulbs. Make it easy on yourself and make a cage large enough to plant at least a dozen bulbs. Or you can make it really easy on yourself and stick to Daffodils, which rodents and most other animals avoid. Replace the soil on top of the bulbs. Water the bulbs after planting, to help them establish themselves. Remember the first and most important rule to gardening, which is to have fun.

