

Spring

Flowering Bulbs

Saturday, September 27, 10:00-11:30

Now is the time to plant the ultimate low-maintenance perennials. Learn when bulbs bloom, which fertilizers are best, which bulbs are deer and rodent-proof, planting combinations, how to plant them and more. Hear of a few fall blooming bulbs and some to grow indoors (more in the 11/12 class). Plant now for color April - July.

What are Bulbs?

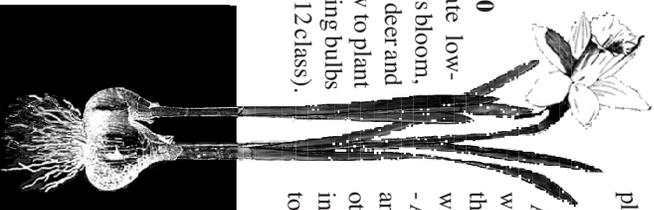
In parts of the world where summers are hot and dry, or winters temporarily make growth impossible, mother nature and evolution have produced a plant form which thrives. The term "bulb" has a distinct structural definition separate from corms, tubers, rhizomes and tuberous roots but these all share characteristics of buds and a fleshy storage organ underground. They are all loosely called "bulbs". Bulbs behave in some ways like seeds. Each is a storehouse of nutrients and moisture which can carry the plant through the harshest conditions in a "sleeping" state until environmental conditions favor growth. Our native bulbs include species of **Lily**, **Brodiaea**, **Allium**, **Camassia**, **Calochortus** and **Fritillaria** among others.

Bulb planting

Bulbs will look great just about anywhere you plant them, around a tree or mailbox, in a rock garden or even in an informal lawn. Look at the pictures on the bins for planting ideas when you're making your bulb selections.

Generally speaking, most bulbs will thrive in loose, organic soil. Good drainage is the one **MUST**. **Kellogg's Amend** is a perfect compost for improving native soil and plenty should be mixed in. Add a fertilizer high in Phosphorus (the second number on a fertilizer label). Phosphorus builds strong roots and promotes large flowers. **Bonemeal**, for example, (~0-12-0) is an excellent natural slow release fertilizer for bulbs. **Dr. Earth Bulb Food** is better.

The only outstanding design suggestion for bulb planting outdoors is to **plant en masse**. Bulbs look arresting when



planted in large plots. It is much easier to dig one large hole 6 inches deep, add compost and fertilizer, and space out your bulbs therein than to plant each bulb individually. As a general rule space bulbs twice as far apart as they are wide. Plant most bulbs so the tip of the bulb is as deep as the bulb is tall (or wide, whichever is greater...except lilies which go twice as deep). Consider blooming time (March - August), height (1 inch - 4 feet), bloom size (1-10 inches) and color (every color of the rainbow to match with your other flowering shrubs and perennials). Plant smaller bulbs in a shallow layer above deeper larger bulbs in the same bed to achieve a greater effect with less work.

Winter cover, a loose mulch, is helpful to bulbs in areas where the winter cover of snow is not reliable or constant through the winter. This is not to prevent frost or freezing, but to reduce alternate freezing and thawing that can ruin many plants.

Bulbs in a lawn give your garden an early playful appearance of a wild meadow. They bloom and fade long before you'll ever need to mow. **Crocus**, **Scilla** and **Chionodoxa** are all excellent candidates for lawn bulbs. Plant in wide drifts of like colors and in time they will spread.

Woodland plantings use bulbs which "naturalize" (adapt and spread) in open shade. Bulbs add a cheerful display before many woodland perennials will be in bloom. "Woodland" Narcissus, **Ice Follies daffodil**, **Anemone**, **Chionodoxa**, **Crocus** and **Scilla** planted along with **Ostrich** and **Lady fern**, **Coral bells**, **Bleeding heart**, **Forget-me-nots**, **Sweet woodruff** and **Hosta** make a beautiful woodland planting.

Planting in pots and barrels outdoors can be tricky (also see Forcing, below). The larger the container the better your chances for success. Make sure you provide for ample drainage. In a large wire barrel plant bulbs as you would in the garden and keep the barrel out of the sun for the winter to avoid thawing / freezing cycles that will destroy the bulbs. In smaller wooden pots it seems to work well to bury the entire container under a foot or more of pine needles in a shady spot. Clay pots usually disintegrate in our winters. Remember that after the flowers fade, the bulb is developing buds and storing up nutrients for next year's flowers.

It is therefore most important to feed, water and encourage the bulbs to retain their green leaves for as long as possible. Remember this when cutting flowers to bring indoors. Taking a few flowers from a bunch of **daffodils** is of little consequence since there are many leaves and flowers on the same stem may not return if the leaves are cut down.

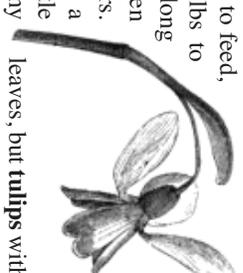
It is good to cut dead flowers from as high on the stem as possible to retain the green and keep the plants from making seed that robs the bulb portion of the plant of nutrients.

When bulbs have increased in a location beyond their means (this is evident when there is more and more foliage with fewer flowers) it is time to divide. Late spring, as the foliage is just beginning to fade, is a good time to dig up the bulbs, pull them apart and replant them into new locations with the foliage intact. This may be done in fall as well. Fertilization each fall by scratching bulb food or bone meal into the soil greatly increases bulb performance.

Types of bulbs

Narcissus species are perfect flowering perennial bulbs that may be fragrant, will bloom every year without irrigation, are never eaten by rodents or deer and make great cut flowers. **Narcissus** is the Latin name for a Genus of plants which includes such well known favorites as **daffodils** and **paperwhites**. **Narcissus** are available in all shades of yellow, white, oranges and in recent years reds and pinks. **King Alfred**, the best known **yellow trumpet daffodil** was introduced in 1899.

Tulip species range from beautiful wild rock-garden varieties to branching, multi-flowered garden varieties, fragrant varieties, and huge, giant flowering varieties. **Tulips** are available in every color and no other bulb rivals their mass effect. **Tulips** are, however, eaten on occasion by voles, gophers, and squirrels. Prevent this problem with a simple barrier of hardware cloth (wire mesh with ~1/2 inch holes) placed over and under the bulbs when they are planted. Bird netting has also been used with fair results. Planting with garlic and spraying the bulbs with a repellent like **Ropel** or **Liquid Fence** has also offered some protection.



There are many other types of bulbs which will thrive and naturalize in our mountain environment. Some of the bulbs are large like the **Giant Alliums** (the Queen of Bulbs) some with flower heads up to 12" across or small like the spreading bunch-flowering crocus which are the best for naturalizing.

When should bulbs be planted?

In Truckee the planting time depends upon your location. In general, high altitude areas should plant in late September and high desert areas plant in late October or early November, depending on the weather. It is fine to plant until the soil is too frozen to work. ("I've had good results planting **Daffodils** in January and once in March!" e.)

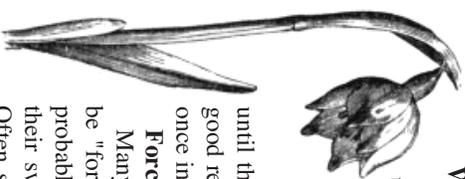
Forcing hardy bulbs to bloom indoors

Many of the hardy outdoor bulb varieties can be "forced" to bloom indoors. **Hyacinths** are probably the most widely forced bulb because of their sweet fragrance, compact size and ease. Often special bulb forcing glasses or ceramic pots are used to enhance the effect. We offer **Hyacinths** in the largest, "forcing" size for better indoor blooms. These also are the best in the garden. **Anemone, Crocus, Grape Hyacinth, Scilla, Chionodoxa, Daffodils** and **Tulips** can all be "forced".

Pot the bulbs into well-draining potting soil with the tips just at the soil line. Water them in and set the pot in a cold (but not freezing: 35-45°F) location for 2-4 months, depending on the bulb. The minimum cold periods are:

- **Anemone, Muscari:** 8-10 weeks
- **Chionodoxa, Scilla:** 10-12 weeks
- **Hyacinths, Small Daffodils:** 12-14 weeks
- **Tulips:** 14-16 weeks

You can store the bulbs in paper bags in the refrigerator for a few weeks before planting in December. (this is a good idea with true bulbs as it allows the buds to further develop). Do not allow potted bulbs to dry out. Check them once a week. After the chilling period, bring bulbs gradually into a well lit room. When foliage begins to appear place in position of direct morning sun for one to two hours a day. When flowering begins put them where they can be enjoyed.



After blooming, let the foliage grow until it turns yellow and then plant in the garden after winter.

Forcing in a vase or on rocks: Place bulbs in mouth of vase or just into gravel. Add water to a level just below and not touching the bulb. Set the vase in a cool dark place (see above for times). Check regularly and maintain the water level. When sprouts are as long as the bulb move the vase to a warmer bright spot (<65°F), avoid direct sunlight.

Autumn Crocus and Colchicum are hardy bulbs that bloom in the fall. They have leaves in the spring, store up nutrients and make buds then go dormant for the summer. In the Fall they send up only flowers and will bloom whether planted or sitting on the counter. If planted indoors it is nice to grow a little grass in the pot to compliment the beautiful pink flowers.

Tender bulbs for indoor bloom

Some bulbs are native to warmer climates and will not survive outdoors through our winters but will bestow spectacular color in your home during the bleak winter months. These bulbs require no cold treatment.

Paperwhite Narcissus are fragrant and easy to grow. Their sweet fragrance can perfume an entire house. You can grow them on pebbles, marbles or terra cotta gro-rocks in bowls or vases or soil in pots. You can keep several dozen in a cool place then bring them out and pot them up every 2 weeks for endless crops of blooms through the winter. There are special **paperwhite** vases with wire supports for the masses of loveley blooms.

Tender bulbs in a vase or on rocks are grown without chilling. Set the vase out of direct sunlight at room temperature for 2-4 weeks. Check regularly and maintain the water level (That's It. They'll bloom). When the blooms are spent, give the bulbs to someone in a much warmer climate.

Amaryllis is THE favorite indoor bulb. There is nothing that compares to these beauties with their spectacular, enormous blooms during the bleakest days of winter. The traditional large **Amaryllis** bulbs are up to 6 inches across, easily grown, and will give you 3-12, 6-8 inch showy blooms on 2-3, 2 foot stalks. It is sometimes necessary to support the enormous blooms with a loop-stake.

The smaller bulbs of miniature **Amaryllis** give you more flowering stalks over a longer period of time with still quite large, 5-6 inch flowers. They begin arriving in mid November.

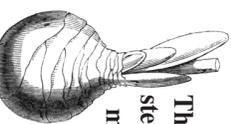
These spectacular flowering bulbs are the easy to grow and they require no chilling. Use a pot with a diameter twice that of the bulb. Put an inch of rock or gravel at the bottom. Add enough well-draining potting soil to fill half the pot. Place the bulb on top and add enough soil

to cover two thirds of the bulb. Keep moist but not wet and increase watering when the bulb sprout begins to grow.

After blooming, cut off only the spent flower head and grow the bulb as you would any house plant in a bright south or west window. Fertilize frequently through early summer, then stop feeding. The bulb will send-up flowers again each fall or winter.

Other Bulbs to try -

Native Canas Lily is a spectacular bloomer that quickly spreads to form a large and long blooming clump. Some of the **Allium** are very able seeders and besides growing larger bulbs and dividing, more bulbs will form from the seeds, and within 3 years many more blooming plants will appear. **Fritillaria** (the King of Bulbs) is a stinky thing that seems to repel squirrels. The flowers are striking in yellow or orange.



The bigger the bulb the better: more flowers per stem and more stems per bulb. You'll get many more blooms for your money. The Villager nursery always selects the top quality and the largest grades available for all of our premium bulbs.

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