



Tips for Planting Bulbs

Gardeners always seem to be on the quest for more color. Like chocolate, it never seems like we can get enough. We want sizzling action in our beds (ahem, garden beds) and continuous waves of color that will knock our muck boots off. If we can save money and time in this pursuit, all the better. Spring, summer and fall blooming bulbs are an easy solution for creating sensational color. Remember the three most important rules below and your bulbs will thrive.

The Three Rules

- A bulb's planting depth is three times its height with few exceptions.
- Plant bulbs with the pointy side up. If you are not sure of the pointy side, don't fret. A neat attribute of most bulbs is the ability for an emerging stem to seek the soil's surface despite its orientation in the ground. You can always plant bulbs sideways for added insurance.
- Most bulbs require good drainage so they don't rot. Some are more sensitive to moisture than others.

After spring flowering bulbs are finished blooming, remove the flower stalk so energy is directed back into the bulb instead of seed formation. Wait until the leaves are brown before cutting back the foliage. Ideally, you should be able to simply pull the leaves off. The one exception to this rule is for Daffodils. Their foliage takes a long time to cry 'Uncle'. With these I still cut the flower stalks off after blooming but in early July I also shear the foliage to create a short 6" tall 'grassy' clump. If you're the type that impatiently taps your fingers waiting to clean up spring bulb foliage use dwarf or miniature varieties, those that top out at 10". These do their flowery business and go dormant quickly.

If bulb-chomping critters are a problem you can:

- Plant bulbs an inch or two deeper than standard protocol.
- Drench bulbs in Repels-All.
- Use chicken grit (crushed shells) or crushed gravel. Toss some in the hole with the bulb. The sharp fragments feel nasty on tender noses. You can buy chicken grit at farm and feed stores.

- Plant bulbs in large pots. Sink the pre-planted pots in the ground in fall and remove them after they've finished blooming in spring. You can fill the empty spot with annuals or better yet, replace with them with similar-size containers of tender tropicals, such as Cannas or Elephant Ears, that you've overwintered inside.
- Use wire cages to protect bulbs, although I find these too much of a drag to fiddle with. Plus I hit them when digging in new plants or dividing perennials.
- Finally, you could simply use poisonous bulbs such as Daffodils, Fritillaria, and Colchicums. Although this sounds cruel, the 'muncher' takes one nibble of the bulb and realizes it's bad for tummies and moves on, unharmed.