

Bulbs for Spring Gardens  
Caroline McNulty  
9-1-2010

Fall is the time to plan and purchase bulbs that will bring your spring garden to life. Here in the Pacific NW, our long cool spring gives us the opportunity to have blooms from February through May. Bulbs can be used in the garden, grown for cut flowers and even used in pots for outdoors or bringing indoors.

Among the different spring blooming bulbs sold at local nurseries or through mail order catalogs are: crocus, tulips and hyacinth (for sun); anemone, early snowdrops and muscari (for shade). Most spring blooming bulbs need a root growing period brought on by cooler temperatures. The shorter cool days in October and November are ideal to plant these bulbs.

Since our winters are wet, preparing the soil so it has good drainage is essential. Planting depth varies on the type of bulb. The recommended depth for each is found on the packaging or growing instructions. Generally, the larger the bulb, the deeper it goes with a general rule of planting depth three times its height.

Cultivate the soil about 12" deep. Add organic matter. This binds sandy soil and loosens clay soil. Well rotted compost and manure are both excellent organic additives. Use a general fertilizer (10-10-10) and rake into the soil. Or buy fertilizer labeled for bulbs and follow directions on the box. Some sources suggest a different content such as 5-10-20 (5% nitrogen, 10% potash, 20% potassium). I have had success using products sold as bulb fertilizer.

The pointed end (nose) is always facing up and the amount of soil for each specific bulb is above this. Water in after planting (or before if soil is very dry). Little attention is needed until the new growth appears in the spring. At that time, apply fertilizer again. Gently water in.

These spring bulbs do not need to be lifted and stored over the drier summer. For a spot that gets summer irrigation, you may wish to lift and store the bulbs in a dry place after the foliage has died down.