

Turkish Turbans and Tulips?
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The history of the genus *Tulipa* is long and storied. Most of us associate the tulip with the Netherlands (shipping 10 billion bulbs each year), but when they say the journey IS the destination, that is certainly true of the tulip. The tulip begins as a native of the mountainous regions of Central Asia before migrating into China and Mongolia. From there, it arrives in Turkey and then on to different parts of Europe. The tale that lies in between is intriguing.

As the story goes, in the late 1600s, a Flemish ambassador to the Ottoman Empire (huge state formed by Turkish tribes in the 13th century) was out walking when he noticed a plot of lovely flowers growing wild. Asking a Turkish farmer what they were called, the Turk replied “tulip.” The farmer believed the ambassador was asking about his turban of all things. The diplomat documented the word ‘tulip’ only to discover later that the Turkish word for ‘tulip’ is actually ‘lale’ (pronounced lâleh). And that is merely the beginning of the tulip’s celebrity. The Ottoman Empire’s wealthiest years were known as “Lale Devri” or the Tulip Era. They exported tulips to the Dutch which set off “Tulipmania” in late 1636. The cost of tulip bulbs became exorbitant. One bulb cost as much as a house on an Amsterdam canal. This rollicking commodity market crashed abruptly in early 1637. Phew! But the Dutch tulip market was born.

Enough history? Let’s look at the facts, just the facts, about growing tulips. They like full sun and sandy (or fast draining) soil. Location! Location! Location! Tulips do not like to be where other tulips have been. Are they odd or do tulips simply have high morals? Either find a new location, or replace the soil. Plant the bulbs in late October or early November 4-8 inches apart and 3 times as deep as the bulbs are wide. To discourage gourmet inclined varmints, use chicken wire to encase the bulbs (or plant a clove of garlic with them).

Tulip history? Who would have thought? Plant and enjoy! Oh, and PS. if cut tulips lean in the vase, add several copper pennies, they will stand at attention.