

## Time to Plant Spring-flowering Bulbs

Late September through October is an excellent time to plant your favorite spring-flowering bulbs. Crocus, tulips, and daffodils all need to develop roots in the fall before blooming the following spring. In addition, these bulbs must meet a chilling requirement (twelve weeks below forty degrees Fahrenheit) over the winter in order to bloom in the spring. To ensure a healthy establishment for your spring bulbs you'll need an appropriate planting site, good soil, nutrients and appropriate watering.

To begin, choose a planting site with partial shade to full sun. An ideal soil is a sandy loam, but even poor soils can be used if organic matter (peat moss, compost or aged bark) is incorporated into the soil. If you have a heavy clay soil, the most common soil type for our region, you can amend it by mixing one-third to one-half organic material into the soil. Bulbs require good drainage and soil aeration for proper development.

Most bulbs prefer a soil pH between 6.0-7.0. Adjustments to pH and fertilizers should be made in accordance with a soil test. Additional information about soil testing in Shawnee County can be found on our website: <https://www.shawnee.k-state.edu/lawn-garden/soil-testing.html>

Planting depth is the distance from the bottom of the bulb to the top of the soil. To determine how deep you need to plant your bulbs, variety and size are the primary factors to consider. Tulips and hyacinths should be planted about six inches deep while daffodils should be planted six to eight inches deep. Size of the bulb may help to determine an approximate planting depth although most packages will direct you to the appropriate planting depth. Bulbs should be planted two to three times as deep as their width. Larger bulbs should be spaced four to six inches apart while smaller bulbs should be spaced one to two inches apart.

Once your bulbs are placed in their holes at the appropriate depth, replace half the soil and add water. This will settle the soil around the bulbs and provide good bulb to soil contact. After that you may add the remaining soil and water again. This fall you won't see any top growth but the bulb's roots are developing and preparing to put out spring flowers. This underground growth means it is important to keep the soil moist, but not soggy. Bulbs that are kept too wet may rot and never emerge in the spring. After the first frost it is a good idea to add mulch to prevent smaller bulbs from being worked out of the soil by temperature fluctuations.

As you design your bulb bed, consider planting in groups. Clumping or massing bulbs formally, geometrically or in a naturalistic way all have a stunning visual impact. Variety selection is virtually endless but there are a few that stand out. Crocus is a cup-shaped flower in bright purple, yellow and lavender. Grape hyacinths appear as small, purple grape clusters on small plants that look great in large numbers. Galanthus, or snowdrops, have a dainty, drooping, white flower with green tips and appear very early in the spring. Anemone is a low-growing star-shaped flower that makes a perfect ground cover or can be forced to bloom in small pots. Scilla, also known as wood squill, are blue and white with a delicate scent and spread quickly. Tulips, the most familiar spring bulb, are classified by height and bloom times. The Botanical tulips are the first to bloom in the spring. They are valued for their varied shapes, unusual foliage and gorgeous colors. Emperor, or Fosteriana, is mid-sized with large flowers, and

Kaufmanniana is low-growing and resembles a water lily. The hybrid tulips are single-early and double-early tulips that bloom in mid-April. Giant Darwin hybrids are among the most popular tulips blooming April through May, with vibrant colors on strong stems. Peony flowering tulips are double, long lasting, late bloomers that resemble a peony flower. Another popular bulb noted for its profusion of color and shape is the narcissus, commonly called daffodil. These bloom in April, make great cut flowers and are used in the garden for early color. The most popular daffodil is the King Alfred.

Bulbs offer you the perfect opportunity to create vibrant designs amidst the brown and greys of early spring. Although patience is required to tend to a plant you cannot see for many months, the results will make the effort worth it. Don't forget to mix and match colors and bloom times for a spring bed your neighbors are sure to envy!