Bulbs and related structures

Because bulbs store food and water in either a specialized stem or root, they are well suited for all climate zones in the United States. The name “bulb” is used to describe not only true bulbs but also a variety of other plants that produce underground storage structures. The plants that are grouped together include true bulbs, corms, tubers, rhizomes, and tuberous roots. The true bulb is a modified stem made up of closely packed, fleshy leaves attached to a basal plate (Tulip, Narcissus, Hyacinth, and Lily); the corms is a modified stem composed of a solid throughout with small buds at the top (Gladiolus and Crocus); the tuber is a modified stem with nodes (“eyes”) on skin (Potato, Gloriosa); the rhizome is a modified stem that grows underground or along the soil surface, producing roots from its undersides and leaves or shoots above the ground (Iris); and finally, the tuberous root is a modified root that look like tubers but do not produce nodes (Dahlia, Begonia and Cyclamen).

Fall-flowering Bulbs

Fall-flowering bulbs are a special treat for any garden. Flowering plants of any type will give the viewer instant gratification from the beautiful colors and interesting shapes they produce in a garden. Much more satisfactory in the garden are the bulbs, from which a blanket of rainbow colors will capture the interest of any passerby. The following are bulbs that will provide several weeks of color to your garden.

Colchicum spp. (Autumn Crocus)

Because Colchicum is generally available at your local or catalog nurseries. Keep in mind that you should plant them as soon as you get the bulbs or they may bloom in the carton. Plant them in August or September in moist, well-drained soil as well as in full sun. The ideal planting depth is four inches and spacing is the same distance. Flowers appear soon after planting, followed by foliage in spring and withering by early summer. Colchicum is adapted to USDA zones 4-9.

Crocus sativus (Saffron Crocus)

Saffron crocus blooms late in the autumn. The corms are planted in early fall in well-drained soil in full sun. Plant one or more corm four inches deep and four to six inches apart. To collect the saffron, pick the stigmas as soon as the flowers open. Air dry the stigmas as quickly as possible and store in a closed container away from light or heat.

Spring-flowering Bulbs

Spring flowering bulbs can be used in flower gardens, under trees, ornamental containers, and in bedding gardens. Once the soil is prepared, daffodils, narcissus, tulips, and tropical bulbs can be naturalized in containers, lawns or natural gardens.

Freesia

Plant two inches deep and two inches apart in well-drained soil in a sunny location. Keep the soil moist during the growing season and fertilize monthly. They
require sun and protection. Plant in autumn freesia does best when the nights are cool. Staking is advised to keep the stems upright. After blooming, let the foliage die back.

Narcissus (Daffodil)

In fall, plant bulbs in deep, fertile, well-drained soil in full sun to light shade. Plant them six inches apart and eight inches deep in groups of odd numbers such as 5, 7, 9 or more. Water the bulbs during their growth period and after flowers bloom, let the foliage die back naturally before cutting it back. Narcissus can be left undisturbed to naturalize for years. To transplant Narcissus, dig and divide the bulbs in autumn after the foliage has turned brown.

Muscari (Grape Hyacinth)

Plant in fall in well-drained soil in full sun to light shade 3-4" deep and 3" apart, preferably in clumps of 10-12 bulbs. Wait until spring to fertilize with a well-balanced fertilizer. Grape Hyacinth will multiply freely and can be left undisturbed for years once established in a container or garden.

Tulipa spp (Tulip)

Plant tulips in late fall in humus-rich, sandy, well-drained soil. Grow them where they will receive full sun, or at least five to six hours of direct sunlight a day. Dig the soil to a depth of eight to twelve inches and mix a balanced bulb fertilizer in to soil. Depending on size and variety of the bulb, set each set four to eight inches deep and space them four to eight inches apart. In late spring or early summer and after flowering, remove the head of the tulip but allow the stem and foliage to die back naturally. Tulips perform best their first year; many garden designers as well as gardeners treat them as annuals, discarding the plants after they finish blooming. Research has shown that if a slow-release fertilizer is applied in the fall, the plant will flower for more than one year. Many early-flowering species, as well as Darwin Hybrid Tulips, come back year after year with no effort.

In Southern California in USDA zones eight to ten, refrigerate the bulbs for about 8 weeks at 40-45 degrees. In the garden plant the bulbs after Halloween at six to eight inches deep in a lightly shady area to keep the bulbs as cool as possible. Dig and discard the tulips after they bloom. Tulips are often planted in rows, but the result is a formal look, much like soldiers lined up in ranks. For a more informal look, plant them in groups of five to eleven or more in natural swathes. Plant several different varieties of tulips throughout the garden to extend the blooming time.

Ranunculus (Persian Buttercup)

Plant in the fall or spring. In Zones 4-7, apply heavy mulch. Choose a spot in full sun with well-drained, sandy, slightly acid soil. Before planting, soak corms for three to four hours in warm water. Plant corms with claws pointing downward, four inches deep and four apart in the garden or one corm one inch deep in a six inch pot. As soon as the foliage appears, fertilize weekly. Ranunculus like cool nights and sunny but not hot days. They grow best when the soil around the crown is dry but the roots are moist. Do not over water.
History of Bulbs

Go to (http://bulb.com/history.asp)