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Brent and Becky's Bulbs

Narcissus 'Mariner', a split corona daffodil, is a spectacular flower.

Thinking Ahead: Spring Bulbs

By Cathy Slavin

It may seem untimely at the height of summer to be talking about creating a display of spring flowers, but now is the time to be planning for, ordering and preparing to fall-plant bulbs for spring bloom. They provide some of the first bright signs of the growing season and are invigorating after winter, when the predominant colors are shades of brown and gray.

Smaller bulbs, such as snowdrops, crocuses, scilla and grape hyacinths tend to be very early blooming and are best planted in areas you walk past when walking back and forth to your door.

Daffodils can bloom from early to late spring. They can be planted around other plants/shrubs, or in woodland areas. I like to plant them where they can be readily seen from my windows so I can enjoy them without venturing out into the cold and wet weather of early spring. Some of the newer varieties of daffodils, with split coronas and double flowers, are quite complex and amazing—these are not your grandmother's daffodils!

All of the above bulbs tend to naturalize, meaning they come back each year with even more blooms.

Later in the season, tulips emerge in all the colors of spring. Some combine multiple colors to create a vibrant show on a single flower. In my yard, the creatures tend to dig up, eat and sometimes move my tulip bulbs. The secret to success with them is to plant more than the native fauna can devour! You can also plant them close together in pots and cover the pots with chicken wire to deter their would-be nemeses. I've found tulips to be less reliable at coming back year to year, though some varieties (e.g., Darwin Hybrids) are more reliable than others.

Fall planted allium bulbs can provide quite a display. Some varieties (Ambassador and Globemaster) shoot up to five feet tall and bloom in huge orbs that can be 3-5 inches across. Others, such as *Allium schubertii*, provide a fireworks display that can be 7-8 inches across! The seed heads persist for months.

I've found a few effective methods for planting bulbs. I always plant them in groupings and have found that larger groupings have more impact. I try to plant them in odd numbers, from 5 to 11 in a group. My preferred method is to dig a large irregular hole to the appropriate depth (see specific bulb instructions), arrange the bulbs (spaced as instructed) randomly at the bottom of the hole and then backfill. I sometimes plant small bulbs with a hand spade since they don't need to be planted as deeply, but still try to get them spaced appropriately and in a randomly shaped grouping. I also have a tool called a ProPluggger that you can use to pull a plug of soil out of the ground, insert a bulb, and then insert the plug back in the hole. It's effective and reduces time spent on your hands and knees.

I tend to order my bulbs from online sources. I've had good luck with Brent and Becky's Bulbs and they have a good selection. You can get there via the link bloominbucks.com and select the Falmouth Garden Club to support the club's many programs that benefit local causes. If you're committed and want to plant in large numbers, Colorblends (colorblends.com) is a wholesale nursery that sells high quality bulbs to everyone but they sell bulbs in larger numbers and have a minimum purchase. Local nurseries and big box stores also supply bulbs.

A little effort in the fine weather of fall can bring you years of rewards. Enjoy!