

Selecting & Planting Spring Bulbs

As fall approaches, many perennial plants are getting ready to go dormant for the winter, but it is time to start thinking about next spring's floral display and planting spring-flowering bulbs.

The best time to plant spring bulbs is in late September through October to allow sufficient time for a good root system to develop before winter.

Spring bulbs need a cold period during the winter to bloom. Depending on the location, spring bulbs begin blooming in Illinois in late February (snowdrops) and continue until late June (alliums).

Selecting Bulbs to Plant

- Bulbs can be purchased at local garden centers or stores or ordered from catalog or online sources.
- When purchasing bulbs, keep in mind that larger bulbs will produce larger blooms.
- Bulbs should be firm and free of rotting spots or signs of disease.
- If the bulbs cannot be planted immediately after purchasing, store them in a cool, dry place and away from ethylene-producing fruits (apples, bananas, melons, pears, and peaches) to prevent flowering disorders.

Selecting and Preparing a Site

- For the greatest visual impact**, plant bulbs in groupings, and large drifts or waves of color. Mix them in with other perennials and shrubs to screen the foliage after blooms fade.
- To produce maximum blooms**, most bulbs will need at least eight hours of sunlight daily.
- Most bulbs require fertile, well-drained soil** to prevent the bulb from rotting. Poorly drained soil can be improved by adding organic matter such as compost or peat moss. The material should be incorporated into the soil before planting at a rate of 4 part soil, 1 part organic matter. A balanced fertilizer (20-20-20) can also be incorporated into the soil at this time.



Planting Bulbs

The general rule of thumb when planting bulbs is to plant them two to three times the length of the bulb, measured from the bottom of the bulb.

- Large bulbs**, like daffodils or tulips, should be planted 6 to 8 inches deep.
- Small bulbs**, like snowdrops and crocus, should be planted 3 to 4 inches deep.

Bulbs are planted with the nose of the bulb facing upward and the root plate facing downward. Bulbs should be spaced 6 to 12 inches apart to allow for the spread and future divisions.

After covering the planted bulbs with soil, water the area well to settle the bulbs into the soil and initiate root development. If there is little rain in the fall, continue to water weekly until the ground freezes. A light, 2-inch layer of mulch can be added to the soil after planting to minimize temperature fluctuations in the winter and to help conserve moisture in the soil.

MORE INFORMATION / REFERENCES



go.illinois.edu/SpringFloweringBulbs

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