

# Bright ideas for planting bulbs

## HOME & GARDEN

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It may seem strange to start thinking spring. After all, the leaves are getting ready to turn and everything suddenly tastes like pumpkin spice. However, if you want a garden full of beautiful tulips and daffodils come spring, the time to start planning is now.

### When to plant

You still have some time to prepare and research between now and the time the bulbs should be in the ground. The air and soil should definitely be on the chillier side. “You really want the soil to be cool before planting, so wait until the end of October,” said Betty Hoevel with Five Rivers Metroparks. “Keep bulbs in a cool, dry place until you’re ready to plant them. You can actually plant later than October, as long as the ground is not frozen.”

“The simple answer is that bulb planting season starts once your soil temperature reaches about 55 degrees Fahrenheit,” said Tim Schipper of Connecticut-based, national flower bulb wholesaler, Colorblends. “The problem is, who knows what their soil temperature is?”

Schipper suggested watching for nighttime temperatures between 40 and 50 degrees Fahrenheit.



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Plant bulbs now for a colorful garden this spring. Contributed

## Where to plant

Bulbs need sunny to partly sunny areas, according to Hoevel, who emphasized that well-drained soil is a must. “If bulbs are in moist areas, they will usually rot,” she explained.

If you’re not sure how to integrate them to your garden, try Hoevel’s suggestions for a beautiful landscape design using bulbs: “Bulbs look better when planted in masses or drifts as opposed to singly. (...) Massing small bulbs under trees can give a stunning effect in early spring. You can also interplant bulbs in already growing areas: if you have daylilies, plant daffodils alongside. If you have vinca ground cover, you can plant crocus, and they will come up in the ground cover.”

Hoevel also suggested layering bulbs. “This means planting deep bulbs, like daffodils, at the bottom, tulips next after adding soil, and finally crocus nearest the top after you’ve added still more soil. This gives an especially nice look when the flowers are all the same color. You can even add pansies to accent them.”

## How to plant

After you’ve chosen your planting location and design — and the temperature is cool enough — it’s time to get those bulbs in the ground. Generally speaking, you’ll want to follow these steps, suggested by Hoevel: Put your bulb(s) at the required depth and add half the soil on top. Water. Add the rest of the soil and water again. After the soil has frozen, add crushed leaves or mulch on top.

You can also plant the bulbs en masse for the wow factor. Schipper explained that it’s fairly easy to plant 100 tulips in 30 minutes. “Dig a shallow planting trench ... about six inches deep,” he said. Then, “position all 100 bulbs in the trench. Place bulbs roughly three inches apart, pointy end up. Slide the soil back into the shallow trench to cover the bulbs. Don’t worry if some of the bulbs flip or turn sideways. Tulips are geotropic, which means they’ll right themselves as they grow. If the soil is dry, water thoroughly.”

## What to plant

“As far as spring blooming bulbs go,” Hoevel said. “Tulips, daffodils and crocus are by far the most popular, with scilla or Siberian squill, hyacinths, alliums and snow drops close behind. As far as summer-blooming bulbs are concerned, lilies are most popular.”

Numerous varieties of each plant exist, and what you plant is largely dependent on personal preference. However, if critters are a problem in your yard, both Hoevel and Schipper suggested daffodils as a rodent- and deer-resistant bulb. Tulips, crocus and lilies are the most popular snacks for pests.

If you've had problems growing in your soil, consider wild tulips, which are native to the steppes and mountains of central Asia. They tend to do well in rocky or sandy soil or harsh climates — they're likely to survive our Midwestern hot summers and freezing winters.