

Friends of Old Bulbs Gazette

[Old House Gardens](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, 734-995-1486

“Gather ye rosebuds while ye may/ Old time is still a-flying/ And this same flower that smiles today/ Tomorrow will be dying.”

–Robert Herrick, English poet (born Aug. 1591) *

Fall Shipping is Almost Here

We’ve learned that our Dutch bulbs are on their way and we expect to start shipping in about two weeks. It won’t be Oct. 1, as we’d hoped, but if we have your order, we’ll ship it to you by the end of October (unless you requested we send it later.) Because we’re starting to print orders to have them ready to go as soon as the bulbs arrive, we can’t make any more changes to existing orders, but we will keep taking new orders for some weeks yet.

Three Tulips Back from the Precipice and On Sale Now



Because of bumper crops in Holland (hurray!) we’ll have more [‘Clara Butt’](#), [‘Elegans Rubra’](#) & [‘Phillipe de Comines’](#) than we expected, and we’re able to offer them on sale to encourage you to try these lovely varieties if you haven’t in the past. All came close to commercial extinction: ‘Clara Butt’ - a shell-pink late-blooming beauty from 1889 - was dropped by the last US grower in 2007; fortunately we were able to send 100 bulbs from his last harvest to our friends in Holland to preserve it. Dark and dramatic ‘Phillipe de Comines’ (1891) had been lost to gardeners till we re-introduced it in 1998, and it’s been a customer favorite ever since. Lily-flowered ‘Elegans Rubra’, though listed as a wild species in 19th century catalogs, hasn’t been found in the wild since, and is now quite rare. Any or all of them would be beautiful in your late-spring garden and we’re thrilled to be able to spread them more widely this year! (And if you already have them on your order, don’t feel left out – we’ll be sure to include some extras so you can be part of the celebration.)

Keep Your Dahlias Blooming Till Frost by Deadheading



Robert Herrick reminds us that all flowers fade in time, but you can encourage more buds and beauty by cutting off blossoms from your dahlia plants as they pass their prime. This keeps the plants from producing seeds and allows the energy to go into new blossoms. It has the added benefits of keeping your garden tidy and giving you an excuse to be spending time outside as the weather turns to fall. Vanessa filled a bucket with spent blossoms this week and found it a lovely break from computer-work preparing for shipping season.

If life keeps you from checking on the plants as often as you'd like, you may not catch every blossom before it has shed all its petals, and they may be harder to spot. In fact, early seed pods can look at first glance like a bud! You can tell them apart – most of the time – because dahlia buds usually are shaped like flattened balls, while seedpods are longer and look more like a cone. This is especially true for singles, but if you look for other buds on the plant you'll be able to see the difference for a particular variety and perhaps fill a bucket yourself!

September is also a great time to strip a few lower leaves off the plants. This increases air circulation and allows you to tie a tag (we use flagging tape and a sharpie) around the stem with the variety name so that you'll know what it is when you dig them up after frost.

As nights become cooler, you may start to see powdery mildew on dahlia leaves. You can make your own spray to treat this by using either Neem oil or the Massachusetts Master Gardeners mix of a few drops of liquid dish soap and a teaspoon of baking soda in a quart of water. You may need to repeat this treatment if you have a particularly wet fall.

Vanessa's Solutions for Bulb Problems in Garden Gate Magazine

smart gardening

SUCCESS WITH BULBS

It isn't too early to think about spring!
Here's what you can do now to ensure beauty then.

There's no better way to have a gorgeous spring than by planting plenty of bulbs in fall. They may not look like much when you buy them, but these little packages are packed with potential! Tulips bloom in a rainbow of colors; cheery daffodils come in every shade of yellow imaginable; petite crocuses and snowdrops provide some of the earliest color you can grow, and that's just the beginning. While many of these spring bloomers are bulbs, some are technically tubers, corms or rhizomes. I'm going to call them all "bulbs" here just to make it easy.

For the most part growing bulbs is super simple. But if you've ever been disappointed in your bulbs' performance or haven't planted them because you weren't sure where to start, help is here. We'll share some expert tips on how and where to plant, how to solve pest problems and even help you choose the best bulbs if you live in the South. Let's get started!

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Vanessa was interviewed recently for *Garden Gate* by Sherri Ribbey and shared some tips for success with fall bulbs. As noted there, even tough customers like heirlooms can run into trouble at times. It's one of our favorite magazines, so pick up a copy if you don't have a subscription, and in the meantime here are some of her tips:

Planting bulbs in mixed flower beds can cause them to rot, since they don't like the regular watering that annuals and perennials need. She suggests using native perennials like coneflowers, switchgrass, and *Amsonia* since their deep tap roots mean that they don't require much watering.

If squirrels tend to dig up your bulbs right after you plant them, try putting down some wire mesh or a piece of landscape fabric on top of the soil to discourage them. Remove it in late winter so that the leaves can emerge easily.

For deer, Vanessa puts a bulb crate over the new leaves as soon as they emerge in the spring. After they've grown to 4-6" tall she takes off the crate and uses a repellent spray - it will wash off in the rain, but often the deer have lost interest and found other plants to eat, hopefully not in the same garden!

For more tips, you can check out our website [here](#).

Fall Care for Peonies



Peonies are known for their toughness and health, and some fall cleanup will help them be at their very best next spring. Once the leaves begin to turn brown, cut the stems back to the ground, collect all the foliage, and throw it away rather than composting it. This helps to keep diseases like botrytis blight, leaf blotch and powdery mildew from overwintering on the leaves. (If the leaves are still green, but looking mildewed, you can use the same spray you may have mixed for your dahlias!).

Peonies seldom need dividing – they are known for returning for decades in cemeteries – but if you’d like to multiply yours, or to move them to a new location, September is the time to do it so they have time to establish a good root system before the ground freezes. Once you’ve cut back the foliage, dig up the plant and if dividing it use a pruning saw or sharp knife to cut the crown into sections that have at least 3 eyes. Use care as the roots and eyes can be brittle. Plant with the eyes facing up in a generous hole no more than 1-2 inches below the soil surface once it’s filled in – deep planting will lead to few blooms – and water well. For more information, see our full planting instructions [here](#).

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