

How to Grow

BULBS

Capital Nursery



THE HISTORY OF BULBS: historical records of bulbs, or at least the flowers they produce, date back to 2,000 B.C. There are paintings of Crocus and Iris on palace walls in Crete and Egyptian temple carvings show several varieties of bulbs decorating the royal gardens. Tulips were brought to Europe in the 1500's from collections of Turkish Sultans. It was quite fashionable among the wealthy to collect unusual botanical varieties and create new hybrids. Single bulbs of hybrid varieties sold for a thousand dollars each. Today it is possible to purchase similar tulip bulbs in our garden shop for a few pennies. As many as 50 colors of tulips will be found there as well as hundreds of other varieties from around the world. You can surpass Sultans and Kings with your own treasures of color and fragrance for very peasant prices.

WHAT ARE BULBS? Bulbs have a built in ability to succeed due to special adaptations by the plants to less than ideal native growing conditions. The conditions vary from good when the plants function normally, to very unfavorable when the plant stores food in specially modified parts and goes dormant. With the return of good conditions, the plant reabsorbs the stored food, produces new leaves and resumes the growth cycle. The bulbs you purchase at the nursery are this 'stored food' stage with every thing necessary for success this year stored away the previous season. To have bulbs regrow and bloom in future years you must continue this growth/storage cycle. The secret to great flowers next year is great after-bloom care this year. If leaves are cut off too soon or if plants are not fed and watered, they do not replace that food and just fade away. The storage part of these plant can take many forms and shapes. 'True bulbs' like daffodils and onions store food in a modified part of the stem with concentric rings. 'Corms' like gladiolus also store food in a part of the stem, but have no rings. Dahlias and sweet potatoes are examples of a 'tuberous root' where the food storage is in the root system. Finally there are 'rhizomes' like iris that store the food in thick stems that grow laterally just under the soil surface.

SELECTING BULBS: The statement "what you see is what you get" is very true when buying bulbs. Jumbo sized bulbs have more stored food from the previous year, and therefore give more vigorous plants and bigger flowers this year. Size can also effect the number of flowers. A 1" size ranunculus bulb will average 20 flowers, while a 1/2" bulb may have only 4 or 5 flowers. With Capital Nursery jumbo sized bulbs, you are getting far more flowers for your dollar.

FERTILIZING BULBS: Bulb plants need nutrients during the part of the cycle when they are recharging the bulb for the next season. To feed new plantings, mix in 2 TBS of Bulb Food with the soil in the bottom of the hole before you set in the bulb. Apply a second feeding around the plant just as it finishes blooming. To feed bulbs that stay in the ground and are not dug and stored each year, apply Bulb Food around the plant just as the growth starts in the spring and then again as they finish blooming.



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PESTS and DISEASES: Bulb plants are relatively pest free. Some insects work underground destroying the bulb part of the plant. For these pests preventative treatment with Sevin Dust in the hole at planting time is the only answer. For varieties that stay in the beds year after year, apply Pest Fighter Meal around the plants as growth begins in spring and repeat in mid summer. Aphids are often found on the foliage of bulb plants. Use Orthene or Nature's Pest Fighter for quick aphid control. For aphid protection that lasts for several weeks spray with Orthene systemic insecticide. Slugs and snails can devastate both foliage and flowers overnight. For effective control use one of the meal or liquid products. Another control for snails is garlic butter, you dip them in it. What you have in your garden are French brown snails and in some languages that means *Escargot*. Ask here for a sheet of recipes and cooking instructions.

COMBINING BULBS WITH ANNUALS In Europe the practice of planting annuals over bulbs is a very common one. They create 'masterpieces' in their gardens and parks by combining colors and textures that change as the different parts of the picture bloom. They create delicate monochromatic pictures using several shades of the same color. Picture combinations of light blue forget-me-nots under dark blue tulips, pink pansies and rose hyacinths or yellow violas with golden daffodils. They can also be very modern with dramatic mixtures of red tulips with bright yellow pansies or white daffodils with orange violas. Tulips, Daffodils, Crocus, Hyacinths and Lilies are the easiest to combine due to the large flowers and sparse foliage. There are several that do not work well: Iris have a massive root system and Cyclamen & Canna lilies have too much foliage. This year you had a choice of 57 colors of tulips to mix with 18 colors of pansies and violas. Just combining these two groups gives you an enormous variety of color combinations. Make a list of your favorite color combinations and then grab your trowel. You just may have artistic talents you wish you had.

DIGGING AND STORAGE: Many bulbs are native to areas where the winter periods when the plants go dormant are cold and dry (snow isn't wet until it melts). If left in the garden during our wet winters, varieties like gladiolus, dahlias, tuberous begonias, tulips and hyacinths will rot so they must be dug and stored. Daffodils, dutch iris, iris, lilies, crocus, and freesias resist rotting and need to be dug only when they become too crowded. When this is done, they should be separated and replanted immediately. A very critical part of digging bulbs is to know where they are located so you dig up whole bulbs, not pieces. When planting, put a short piece of bamboo cane or garden marker along side the bulb to make them easier to find. Dig bulbs at the end of the growth cycle when the foliage has dried and turned brown. Use a spading fork or trowel, being very careful not to cut or bruise the bulbs. Dry the bulbs for a about a week in a shady, well ventilated spot, then trim off old flower stems or foliage and brush off any dirt. Heavy paper bags or cardboard boxes that protect the bulbs but allow some air circulation are best for storage. Plastic bags will rot bulbs. Some pests can spend the winter in storage with the bulbs. Next year you plant these along with the bulbs. Earwigs, roaches and crickets can spend the winter eating the bulbs, leaving you with nothing to plant. To prevent these insects and also fungus that might rot your bulbs, apply sulfur and Sevin Dust by shaking the bulbs in a bag with sufficient dust to thoroughly cover the bulbs (think Shake-n-Bake.) Store the bulbs in a cool, dry location and you will be all set to replant next season.

Simple tips to improve your success with bulbs:

- ◆ *Plant bulbs in clusters. Both short and tall stemmed varieties will stand up well and look better in groups.*
- ◆ *Avoid planting bulbs in distinct patterns; the object is to recreate a random, natural appearance.*
- ◆ *Let foliage die back naturally, without being tied up or cut back while still green.*
- ◆ *There are two bulb planting seasons for different types of flowering bulb varieties: Spring and Autumn.*



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