This Fall: Partner Your Spring Bulbs with Perennials
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When the gray, foggy days of February are fading, nothing cheers me more than walking through the yard and seeing the pointed little heads of spring bulbs pushing through the soil. I know then that in a few weeks, I’ll have the colorful blooms of tulips, daffodils, freesias and more, showing me the promise of sunnier days.

But there’s one thing I don’t like about my spring bulbs, and that’s after their bloom. I know it’s important to leave the dying foliage in place, because that’s how the bulb stores energy for next year’s growth (carbohydrates in the leaves move down into the bulb). But the yellowing foliage can be unattractive in my early summer garden. I’ve spent many a day trying to hide these fading green tops—trimming, twisting, braiding and tying.

However, by partnering the bulbs with late spring and early summer blooming perennials, you can camouflage the dying bulb tops. When the bulb is blooming, the perennial should be in its dormant stage. If the winter has been mild and the perennial did not die back, then late winter/very early spring is a great time to trim it down to a few inches above the soil level. When the perennial starts to grow, the bulb should be nearing the end of its bloom time, and by the time the bloom is gone, the perennial should have grown large enough to cover or at least disguise the fading foliage of the bulb.

Planting perennials just in front of the bulbs also helps you remember where the bulbs are planted, so you don’t accidentally damage them when gardening.

Late October through November is the time to plant spring flowering bulbs in our area. Planning carefully at the planting stage will save you time.
Tulips with emerging foliage of Sedum 'Matrona'

and headaches later on. Here are some things to consider:

- The timing of the growth of the perennial and bulb should be compatible. The perennial should send out new growth fast enough to cover browning foliage, but not so fast that it covers the bulb foliage before it has sufficient time to “recharge” its bulb.

- The perennial should grow large enough to cover the brown bulb foliage. For example, a taller perennial would be needed to cover the foliage from a large daffodil or narcissus.

- For large, aggressive, or fast-spreading perennials, it is recommended to plant the bulbs farther away from the perennial. If the perennial is late to leaf out or is compact, the bulbs should be planted relatively close to the perennial.

- Try similar or complementary colored flowers and foliage.

- Pick bulbs and perennials suitable for the Central Valley’s gardening challenges: cold winters, hot summers and the need for drought-tolerant plants.

Why not pick your pairing now, and plant the bulbs and perennials together? A good source to start looking for ideas for perennials is the UC Davis Arboretum All-Stars list. They have a fabulous website, http://arboretum.ucdavis.edu/arboretum_all_stars.aspx where you can download a copy of the list, use the database to find the right plants for your garden, and learn about All-Stars irrigation and climate zone trials. Sometimes it’s hard to find the exact plant variety they mention, but our local nurseries usually carry something very similar.

Here are some ideas for bulbs and perennials that I’ve used with success:

**Spring bulbs:** Daffodils, Hyacinths, Narcissus, Tulips

**Summer bulbs:** Crocosmia, Iris, Lily

**Spring flowering perennials:** Catmint, Daylily, Echinacea, Ornamental grasses, Penstemon, Salvia, Veronica, Y arrow

**Summer flowering perennials:** Angelonia, Calendula, Cosmos, Marigolds, Periwinkle, Verbena, Zinnia

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