

It's Not Too Late To Plant Flower Bulbs In Your Garden

Leimone Waite, Master Gardener, Oct. 25, 2019

Q. Is it too late to plant bulbs? I want to add some to my yard, but I have never planted them so I am not sure where they will do best.

A. No, it is not too late to plant fall bulbs as long as you plant them in the next couple of weeks. If you miss that window of opportunity, you can wait and plant spring-planted bulbs such as dahlias and gladiolas.

Bulbs are easy to grow and a fast way to add color to your yard without a lot of maintenance. I have iris and daffodil bulbs in my yard and do very little to maintain them, and they always brighten up the yard every spring with showy blooms.

When choosing bulbs, smell the box or bag and avoid any that smell sour or moldy. If choosing from a bin, look for big, firm clean bulbs that don't show any evidence of browning or rotting (soft spots). The larger more-mature bulbs usually produce more flowers than small ones. Some of the easiest bulbs to find and plant now include anemone, allium, freesia, hyacinth, tulip and narcissus. When choosing bulbs pay attention to bloom time listed on the package so that you can create a continuous display over a longer time in the spring and early summer.



Gophers don't usually eat narcissus (pictured) or daffodils bulbs. (Photo: mablache, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Once you have decided which bulbs you are going to plant, spend some time preparing the site. Soil preparation matters; like most plants, bulbs prefer well-drained soil. Plant in raised beds, containers or on a slope if you have dense clay or compacted soil. Amend the planting area with good compost or other organic material before planting.

Don't just amend the hole you are planting into. University of California studies have shown that amending soil in just the hole you dig for the bulb doesn't do much good in the long run. If you're going to amend, do it in a larger area, like an entire garden bed.

And don't forget the fertilizer. Bulbs need an adequate supply of phosphorus, so adding bone meal, super phosphate or fish meal at planting is important to getting healthy plants in the spring.

Another thing to consider is protection from gophers. Some bulbs, such as narcissus and daffodils, the gophers leave alone. To keep gophers from snacking on your other types of bulbs, you may need to plant them in cages made from hardware cloth.



(Photo: yanjf, Getty Images/iStockphoto)

Planting depth and the direction the bulb is planted will determine the success of your bulb garden in the spring. If you plant them too deep or upside down, they may not come up. While all types of bulbs need to be planted with the growth points up and the roots down, it's not always easy to tell which end is which, so rely on the package instructions for correct positioning. Planting depth varies

among different types of bulbs, but the general rule is two to three times the height of the bulb.

Lastly, after planting, mostly forget about your bulbs. Moisten the soil when you plant the bulb, then let the fall and winter rains take over. If we experience dry spells in the colder months, water sparingly. Too much watering will cause bulbs to rot.

After the bulbs are done blooming, fight the urge to snip off unsightly foliage. Bulbs use this time to continue photosynthesis in order to replenish nutrients for next year's bloom. If you can't stand the sight of fading leaves, plant the bulbs among other perennials or annuals that will hide the foliage.

The Shasta Master Gardeners Program can be reached by phone at 242-2219 or email mastergardener@shastacollege.edu. The gardener office is staffed by volunteers trained by the University of California to answer gardeners' questions using information based on scientific research.