



## Healthy Garden Tips

### TYPES OF FLOWERING BULBS

By Val Fish, UCCE Master Gardener

All bulbs are defined as “thickened underground stems.” While they have various shapes and sizes, they all function as storage units for the plant’s nutrients. Flowering bulbs may not look like much more than “lumps” but each contains all that the plant needs to grow and bloom. Healthy and mature bulbs are packaged for success!

There are five different types of bulbs: **true bulbs, corms, rhizomes, tubers, and tuberous roots**. Below are examples of each type with recommended planting times.

**true bulbs:** have fleshy “scales” or layers, like an onion. They multiply from bulblets or off-sets.

*Fall planted for Spring bloom* ~ daffodils, tulips, hyacinth, Dutch iris, Reticulata iris, Muscari (grape hyacinth), and Scilla.

*Spring planted for Summer bloom* ~ alliums, amaryllis and lilies

**corms:** don’t have scales like true bulbs but have solid tissue. Many are covered by a fibrous “coat.” They generate new flowering corms each year, as well as small immature “cormels.”

*Fall planted* ~ crocus, freesias and watsonias

*Spring planted* ~ gladiolas

**rhizomes:** are elongated underground stems, growing just beneath the soil. They produce flowering stalks from the growth points at the tip and sides of the rhizome.

*Fall planted* ~ bearded iris, Japanese iris, California native iris and Lily of the Valley

**tubers:** are flat underground stems with multiple growth points or “eyes.” Some tubers, such as begonias and cyclamen, are perennial; they increase in size each year.

*Fall planted* ~ anemones, and ranunculus

*Spring planted* ~ tuberous begonias, tuberose and hardy cyclamen

**tuberous roots:** are actually thickened roots that function the same as bulbs, storing nutrients. Tuberous roots grow in a cluster around a central stem. The growth buds are on the base of the old stem. Most tuberous roots are sold as potted perennials. Bare root divisions are more often available through specialty nurseries and catalogs.

*Fall planted* ~ peonies (or earliest Spring)

*Spring planted* ~ agapanthus, alstroemeria, dahlias and daylilies

**Additional Reading:** *Sunset Western Garden Book*, by Sunset Publishing Corporation, revised edition 2001.