

Spring Bulbs

Published 4/23/19 – Image titled “Tulips Vintage Seeds Poster” circa 1893 from publicdomainpictures.net

After our late, wet, and heavy snow events, it looks like spring is finally here. One of the harbingers of spring are tulips, daffodils, narcissus, hyacinths, crocus, and others. Instead of starting from seed or from a pot, these plants sprout from bulbs. Right now most of these are showing leaves, the earliest may already have flowers, and some are not quite ready to show themselves above ground. Whatever they may be, having a showy bulb bed in the spring is not difficult but starts in the fall.

Newly planted bulbs need to be put in the ground about 6 weeks before the first expected frost, which for Pierre is the first week of October. Backtracking 6 weeks puts us in the last week in August. Put reminders on your phone or wall calendar, but quite frankly remembering to plant the bulbs is the hard part.

Once the end of August rolls around, proper planting depth, pointy end of the bulb up, and protection from marauding animals are all that's left to accomplish. A general rule of thumb is to put the bottom of the bulb 3 times deeper as the bulb is tall. So if you have a 2" bulb, dig down 6" and the bulb will sit on the bottom of that hole. The top of the bulb is the more pointed end and should be facing up. Squirrels and other small animals do dig up bulbs if they can get to them. After filling the holes putting a layer of chicken wire over your bulb planting and then covering that with a nice layer of loose organic mulch giving them the protection needed.



That's a fall plan for planting bulbs. Why not write about this in the fall, well I probably will. But we're heading into the time when mature, older clumps of bulbs may benefit from being divided. A single bulb, the mother, will start to produce offsets and while the daughter bulbs initially cannot flower on their own and need the nutrients collected by the mother, over time the clumps eventually become overcrowded and the competition for water and nutrients starts to show in a decline of vigor and flower production.

So now as bulbs start to flower, take notes on which clumps may need dividing and perhaps even mark them so they'll be easier to find in a few weeks. When the bulbs are done flowering but the leaves are still green and vigorous, gently lift the entire clump out of the ground using a shovel. Then with your hands twist the bulbs until they separate. During this process it's important to keep all roots moist at all times. Once separated, plant each bulb at the same depth as fall planting, water immediately once covered, and put protective wire and mulch over the top. The smallest bulbs may not flower the first year, but larger ones should. This is an easy and inexpensive way to add spring color to your garden.

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