



# GREEN TIPS

Department of Horticulture - Michigan State University

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## BULBS IN THE LANDSCAPE

Before ambition runs away with your pocketbook in the garden center, be sure you have a master plan in mind. For details on how to create a garden plan, see Green Tips sheet on “Planning and Designing an Annual Garden” or “Growing Perennials.” Like annuals, bulbs can be used in the landscape in many ways.

**Beds** - The most frequent use of bulbs is the flower beds. Plan the bulbs as a permanent feature, although they may be moved, if necessary. Some large bulbs can be striking when planted singly, but most are more attractive and noticeable when planted in groups of six or more. Never plant in straight rows in a display garden. See the tables of hardy and tender bulbs for the recommended spacing and planting depth.

**Containers** - Window boxes and patio containers of summer-flowering bulbs are very popular. For example, tuberous begonias, calla lilies and caladiums can be planted in containers in lightly shaded areas.

Spring-flowering bulbs are less commonly grown in containers outdoors because they may freeze over winter if the container is left aboveground. Although the bulbs are hardy, they cannot survive if frozen completely. However, if you sink the container in the ground in the fall and unearth it in spring, you may avoid freezing the bulbs.

**Foundation Plantings** - Bulbs easily fit in among shrubs and are commonly used to add color to a shrubbery border along the walls of a house. However, many bulbs do not grow as well where tree and shrub roots compete with them for food and water.

**Grassy Plantings** - Some homeowners find it delightful to have early-blooming bulbs pop up through the lawn. Although it's not a problem for the grass, this may be impractical because such areas should be left unmowed until bulb foliage begins to yellow, often in mid-June. Leaves must be left on a bulb to make food to build up the bulb for next year's flowers.

**Cutting Garden** - Here belong all your leftovers from other plantings or old groups you have divided. No design is necessary and bulbs are planted in rows because this garden is not for visual display but to provide cut flowers for the table and house.

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**Naturalized Areas** - To naturalize, toss a handful of bulbs on the ground as if you were sowing grass seed. Then plant them in whatever random pattern they land. No manmade rows or clusters here - bulbs appear in natural "drifts" or "waves." Naturalized plantings are perhaps best suited for wooded areas, side yards and other open, low-traffic locations.

**Rock Gardens** - The shortest bulbs work well in rock gardens where the effect is due to an interesting grouping rather than a mass color.

**Landscaping Combinations** - Many bulbs are shown to particular advantage when used in combination with other bulbs and plants. Some examples include:

- *Hyacinthella azureum* and any yellow daffodils.
- White *Anemone blanda* and red or pink Fosteriana tulips.
- Cyclamen or *lycoris squamigera* in perennial ground cover such as creeping phlox or rock cress.
- *Scilla hispanica* with pink tulips.
- Tulips overplanted with dahlias.
- Regal lily with delphiniums.
- *Galtonia* and gladiolus.
- Miniature daffodils and *Scilla siberica*.
- Pure white daffodils with pure yellow daffodils.
- Tulips planted in front of daffodils.
- Chionodoxa and *Kaufmanniana* tulips.
- Pastel tulips with forget-me-nots.
- Tulips interplanted with crocus.
- *Galanthus*, *Chionodoxa* or *Eranthis* under evergreen trees.
- Crown imperials with orange tulips.
- *Puschkinia* with double daffodils.
- *Muscari* under flowering peach or cherry trees.

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