

Spring-flowering bulbs

Nothing can brighten up spring better and put a glowing smile on your face than spring-flowering bulbs. Our large bulbs of carefully selected varieties of daffodils, tulips, alliums, hyacinths and scillas when planted in autumn are guaranteed to give you a fabulous display next spring, as they come with their flower buds already inside and they're all ready and raring to go.

On arrival

Ideally, you should plant your bulbs as soon as they arrive or at your earliest opportunity. If you can't plant them straight away, keep them somewhere cool (as cold as possible, but not freezing), dark and dry. September and October are the best months to plant all of them. Planting can be done later, but this may affect the actual flowering time. Spring-flowering bulbs are very cold hardy, and the only things that will stop you planting them are if the soil is waterlogged or frozen solid to the depth of the planting hole.

Where to grow

Daffodils and hyacinths can be planted in sunny positions or partial or light shade. Tulips need a warm, sunny position and alliums prefer sunny spots too. Plant scillas in sunny positions where they will receive some summer shade – such as the canopy of other plants.

Planting in the garden

- All the bulbs prefer soil that remains moist in spring and well-drained in winter so that it isn't overly wet or waterlogged. Tulips particularly need very good drainage; in heavy clay soils, plant the bulbs on a 5cm (2in) deep layer of sharp, gritty sand or pea gravel.
- Ideally, thoroughly dig over the area where you want to plant your bulbs, remove the roots of perennial weeds and dig in lots of bulky organic matter, such as compost, well-rotted manure or bagged soil improver.
- Either make a hole for each bulb individually or dig out a larger area and plant all the bulbs of one variety within it. For best results, plant with some of my Root Booster and add Flower Power Easy Feed to the soil.
- Plant the bulbs three times deeper than the height of the bulb, so a 2.5cm (1in) high bulb should be planted in a 7.5cm (3in) deep hole, slightly deeper in dry, sandy soils and slightly shallower in heavy clay soils.

Bulb spacing:

Alliums 15-30cm (6-12in) apart; the wider spacing for taller growing varieties

Daffodils 10-20cm (4-8in) apart

Hyacinths 15-20cm (6-8in) apart

Scillas 5-7.5cm (2-3in) apart

Tulips 10-20cm (4-8in) apart

Close spacings will give a more dramatic display.

Growing in pots

- All these bulbs will give a brilliant display in containers. You can use any good multi-purpose or potting compost, such as my Flower Power Premium Multi-Purpose Compost or Flower Power Premium Peat Free Compost.
- Plant at the same depth and spacings for planting in the ground. You can plant slightly closer together for a very dramatic, dense display.
- If you have a selection of different plants, you could try lasagne planting. Plant the tulips first, with the daffodils next, the hyacinths above them and finally the scillas. Lasagne planting will produce a long-lasting display with each bulb flowering one after another.
- If the compost is dry at planting time, give it a good watering after planting.

Aftercare

- You may not need to water until the leaves start to appear but keep an eye on the soil or compost over autumn and winter and water accordingly to prevent them drying out.
- The period after flowering is the most critical if you want the bulbs to flower the following year; this is when they are building up their food reserves and producing next year's flower buds.
- Carefully pull or cut off the faded flowers and the developing seedpods behind them.
- Although it may be tempting to tidy up the plants and remove the foliage or tie it in neat knots, leave it and the flower stems to die down naturally. The bulbs need the leaves to feed them.
- Water the soil or compost as necessary to prevent it drying out. Give a liquid feed of a high-potash liquid fertiliser, such as Flower Power Premium Plant Food, every week to 10 days while they're still in leaf to build up their food reserves even further.
- When the leaves have turned yellow or brown, you can carefully remove them.
- The bulbs can be lifted after all the foliage has died down, and stored in a cold, dark, dry place for re-planting in autumn if you wish. However, it is usually better to leave them where they are; most people don't store them in the right conditions and so they either rot or shrivel up or forget all about them and don't get around to replanting them in autumn!
- Tulip bulbs need a relatively dry summer, so if you're growing them where you will be planting bedding plants, for instance – and watering them all summer – they are best lifted and stored.
- After a couple of years, the plants will produce more bulbs and it's a good idea to lift, split and divide large, congested clumps once the leaves have died down.