

Bulbs

for Fall Planting

In Southern California

Laguna Hills Nursery

(714) 542-5600
www.lagunahillsnursery.com

Compared to other ways of introducing color into your garden bulbs are the most reliable and lowest possible maintenance. Nearly any of these bulbs will perform as expected without irrigation, fertilization, staking or pruning! Bulbs are mature plants, at peak strength, ready to bloom. Most other blooming bedding plants are sold at an immature stage and must be given extra care until established.

Bulb plants are perennials. They are native to climates that have at least one season of conditions unfavorable to growing, either cold or drought. They have no permanent structures, but the same plant will live year after year. During the unfavorable periods the bulb plant will shed its foliage and roots, but at the same time store energy and fertilizer in a sturdy package ready for immediate growth once favorable conditions occur.

Our fall bulbs are native to areas of the World that have a roughly similar climate. Most are native to the lands surrounding the Mediterranean Sea. A smaller, but very popular group is native to South Africa.

A typical bulb will emerge from the soil with foliage first. If the bulb is mature enough (all bulbs we sell are mature) a flower stalk will grow and bloom. After the flower fades the foliage remains green for a period allowing the production and storage of energy for next year's bloom. A new bulb forms as the foliage turns yellow and dies back.

Locating a site

Bulbs perform quite well in full to half sun. Many bulbs will bloom in shade, but require a sunnier location to perform well year after year. Bulbs can be grown in just about any small or large open spot in the garden. Experienced gardeners will often plant bulbs along with another perennial or annual flower with a complimentary growing period so that the space is always occupied. In my garden a huge number of bulbs live permanently under deciduous fruit trees. These come up when the trees are going dormant and provide color during the winter and early spring.

Preparing the Site

All of these bulbs prefer soil that has decent drainage or permeability. Ranunculus requires excellent drainage.

Drainage can be improved by raising the soil level (create mounds or raised beds). Amending the soil with **Laguna Hills Nursery PLANTER MIX** or large amounts of sand improves the soil's permeability. We do not recommend amending the soil with large quantities of organic mulches or manures. Most bulbs will perform adequately without any soil modification.

All bulbs are good container plants. Most will perform well in just about any type of potting soil. For more long-lived bulbs or bulbs that require better drainage, our **Laguna Hills Nursery TOP POT POTTING SOIL** or **ACID MIX** are perfect.

Several bulbs, Dutch Amaryllis, Hyacinth and Paperwhite Narcissus will bloom when merely partially submerged in a glass of water. When grown this way, however, they are usually discarded following the bloom.

Planting the Bulb

Bulbs make a more appealing display if planted in groups of the same type and variety. Three bulbs may be adequate for a pot, but it may take 50+ to be noticeable from the street. Most bulbs multiply over the years.

When planting a large area it is more efficient to first place the bulbs on top of the soil spaced properly. It is not essential to be spaced exactly as recommended. In Nature bulbs are usually seen in colonies with random spacing. Dig a hole to the recommended depth with a hand trowel or bulb auger. The depth is not critical. Most bulbs will readjust their depth at the end of the season. Place the bulb upright and fill the hole. If you can't tell which way is up, place the bulb sideways. Firm the soil gently and cover the surface with mulch.

If the soil is dusty dry, apply several brief irrigations to moisten it. Our winter rainy season will wake up the bulbs.

Later Care

All will perform normally with our typical winter rainfall, but the later bloomers may need some irrigation if there are large plants nearby consuming water. A few bulbs will initiate growth earlier if irrigated before the winter rains. None require fertilizer initially, but future results can be improved if organic fertilizers and/or mulches are applied before or during the growth period.

After the bloom do not remove the foliage until it is totally yellowed. Most fall bulbs can be left in the ground during their dormant period.

Pre Chilling

Most Tulips, some Alliums and Hyacinths perform best when the bulbs are pre-chilled in the refrigerator (not freezer) for 6-9 weeks before planting. These bulbs are put in a paper bag and placed in the produce drawer, isolated from other

produce. Ripening fruit and old vegetables give off ethylene gas, which can affect performance.

All of these bulbs are native to areas with a definite winter season and will only bloom properly after being exposed to 2-3 months of cool (35-45°F) temperatures. In most parts of the U.S. this is not necessary. Although impressive in bloom, these three types of bulbs are not reliable locally beyond the first year.

The Popular Bulbs (fall planted_

Paperwhites are a special type of Narcissus that doesn't require very cool conditions to initiate the bloom. Paperwhites have extremely fragrant white flowers in clusters about a foot tall. Each bulb blooms for several weeks. They typically bloom earliest sometime between mid-November and January. Paperwhites will bloom in a glass of water or in any container that can keep the roots moist. Grown indoors (called *forcing*) Paperwhites will be in full bloom 5 weeks after being watered.

Other Narcissus & Daffodils generally bloom much later unless prechilled (optional). Daffodils are simply Narcissus with large flowers blooming one per stem. Other Narcissus have clusters of smaller flowers on each stem. Colors available can be pure white, pure yellow, pure gold or a combination. A few have pinkish colors. All Narcissus are rugged and long-lived.

Bearded Iris are rhizomes and often evergreen. The rhizomes are stems that travel just below ground and have leaves and flowers at the tips. The rhizomes branch easily and create large, slowly traveling colonies. Bearded Iris bloom heavily in spring and lightly in fall. They will go dormant if the winter is quite cool. Bearded Iris have been extensively bred and colors include purple, blue, brown, magenta, red, pink, yellow, gold, orange, white and nearly black and combinations of these. Each branch of the rhizome can produce 4 flowers over 3-4 weeks.

Dutch Iris is probably our easiest bulb to grow. They appear in late winter and bloom in mid-spring for several weeks. The bulbs multiply quickly to form impressive colonies. Bulbs left on the surface usually still grow.

Freesias boast brilliant colors and wonderful fragrance. These small plants appear in early winter

and bloom in early spring for several weeks. A large colony often blooms for several months. Colors include blue, red, pink, yellow and white, each flower with a contrasting throat color. This is a florist favorite and is often presented with several plants in a small pot.

Ranunculus creates the best garden show value. The fern-like foliage emerges in early winter and the huge, heavily petaled, peony-like, flowers are created 1-2 at a time from March until the first bad heat wave. Some years they will bloom until July. Other years they may go dormant by May. Ranunculus requires excellent drainage and soil permeability, especially if you expect a repeat performance. I believe that these do best if the crop is rotated. Remove them from the ground then replant in a different location. Ranunculus tends to rot if grown in the same location year after year. Colors available include purple, red, pink, white, yellow, and orange.

Anemones are closely related to Ranunculus and basically have a simpler flower. Both Anemones and Ranunculus are wonderful cut flowers. Anemone colors include blue, red, pink and white.

Calla is one of the few bulbs that will perform well in light shade as well as sun. The fall planted Callas bloom white for many months and the plants are often evergreen. Callas start growing immediately after planting and will be in bloom by winter and may bloom until summer. Calla like wet soil, but will rot if the soil is amended with compost. Unfortunately many people associate the white Calla lily flower with funerals.

Amaryllis are popular bulbs that can bloom indoors for the holidays with Christmas colors. The huge flowers are either red, pink or white and each bulb can bloom for a month. When planted outdoors, Amaryllis reverts to its normal pattern of blooming in May. The plants can be evergreen.

Watsonias are related to Gladiolus and grow upright, producing 2-3' spikes of flowers that bloom for a month. A large colony can bloom for 2-3 months. Watsonias may be the fastest multiplying bulb and are almost too easy to grow. Watsonia colors include pink, rose and white.

Sparaxis are small plants that produce brilliant, cheerful bi-colored or tricolored flowers for several months. Colors include scarlet, white and yellow with dark markings. Easy and reliable.

Leucojums are charming bulbs that produce lots of white flowers in early winter. The individual flowers resemble an old fashioned street lamp and occur in hanging clusters. Easy and reliable.

Bulbs that Require Chilling

Tulips are one of the most popular of all bulbs but generally will not perform well locally without special treatment. Tulips are native to an area of Eurasia that resembles the climate of Colorado. Without a definite winter the flowers are short and small and may not bloom at all. We have to pre-chill the bulbs for 6-8 weeks to get a nice bloom lasting about 2 weeks. A good mixture may bloom for over a month. Tulips have been extensively bred and include nearly all colors.

Hyacinths are another popular type of bulb that shows best if pre-chilled and performs best the first year. These bulbs create a short tower of highly fragrant flowers that bloom for several weeks. Colors include purple, blue, pink, red, white and creamy yellow.

Alliums are onion relatives with huge, ball-shaped flower clusters resembling sparklers. Unfortunately the varieties with the largest flowers need to be pre-chilled.