

# Tips on Planting **Fall Bulbs for Spring Bloom**

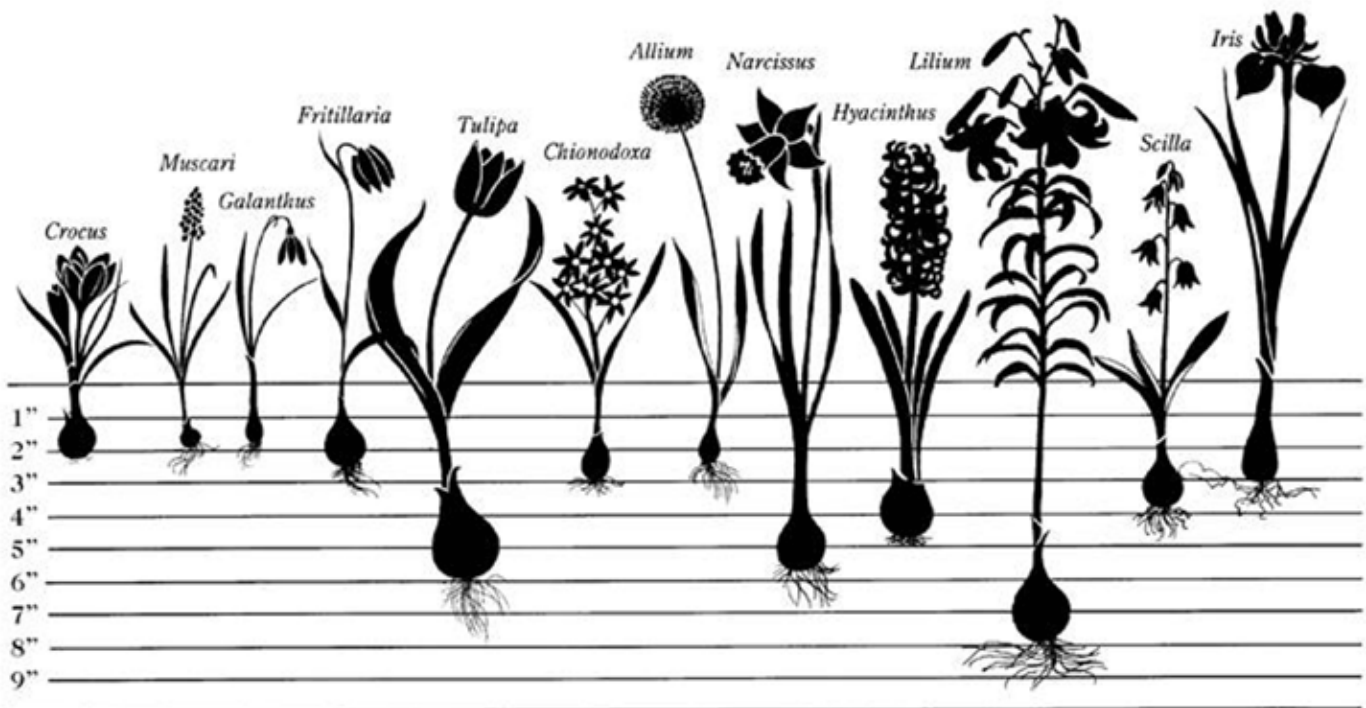
Plant your bulbs as soon as the weather turns consistently cool but before the ground has frozen. Soil that is rich in organic matter with a neutral pH provides the best environment. Since most bulbs prefer to be relatively dry during their dormant period, most perform best when planted in well-drained soil or in elevated beds. Most bulbs will not thrive in areas with poor drainage. Read the labels on individual bulb packages for specific instructions.

Ideally, you should space your bulbs about 6 inches apart. If you're looking for a lush display, you can plant 4 inches apart. Use the chart below as a guide to the proper planting depth for each variety. For bulbs not listed on this chart, a general rule of thumb for planting depth is two to three times the height of the bulb. Tulips are generally planted 6 inches deep and daffodils are planted between 5 and 6 inches deep. Loosen the soil 2 to 3 inches below the approximate planting depth to allow for optimum root development. Firmly place each bulb in the hole with the pointed end upright. If it is difficult to determine which is the top of the bulb, plant it on its side; it will grow upward and perform normally.

Carefully cover the bulbs with soil to prevent breaking off any sprout growth. Do not put fertilizer in the hole with the bulb, as it may burn the tender new roots as they develop. Top-dress with a bulb fertilizer upon planting and each autumn thereafter for best continuing spring bloom. A cover of mulch 2 to 3 inches thick helps to retain ground moisture, reduce weeds, and protect the bulbs from heaving when temperatures spike.

Water at least once after planting and at least once a week in spring if the garden does not receive a half-inch of rainfall per week during the growing season. Avoid planting bulbs in the path of daily dousing from an irrigation system. Dormant bulbs are susceptible to fungal diseases when subjected to constant dampness.

In spring, remove flowers when they have faded, leaving foliage to photosynthesize—a process necessary if flowers are to bloom again the following year. Never cut, tie, braid, or bend foliage; instead, remove it when it begins to yellow and fall over. Bulbs are best if left in the ground to refrigerate for the following year.



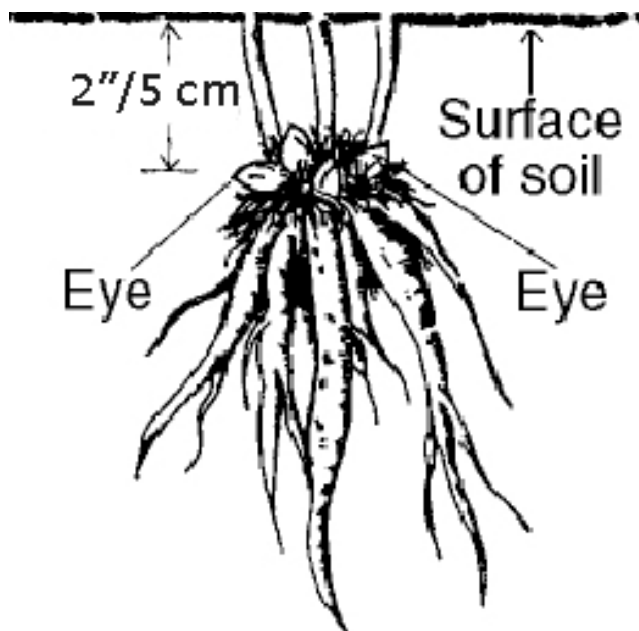
# Tips on Planting Peonies

Peonies can be grown as specimen plants. Place them strategically in long or curving borders where they provide early structure as perennials begin to emerge. They can be massed in the back of low borders where they contribute an early, showy, flower display and then serve as a green backdrop for colorful bulbs, annuals, and perennials. By carefully selecting one single variety and placing plants side by side in a long row, gardeners can create a novel and quite ornamental peony hedge.

To extend the enjoyment of the flowers, choose a few early-, mid-, and late-season types so that they don't all bloom at once. While most colors are in the pink, coral, and red tones, there have been interesting developments in yellow. Consider how you want to use this plant before being swept away by the hundreds available locally and through specialty catalogs. Plant the fragrant ones close to a door or patio or use them as cut flowers. Never cut more than 25 percent of the blossoms from a plant in one season, taking care to cut short stems, leaving as much foliage on the plant as possible.

Plant peonies in the spring as potted plants or in the fall as bare tuberous roots. Cultivate the planting site thoroughly, add compost, and water well. In the fall, set the swollen roots no more than 2 inches below the soil surface. If planted too deeply, the peonies will fail to bloom. Mulch the area over winter just for the first year. Remember to cage your plants when they are 10 to 12 inches tall to support the heavy blossoms.

Peonies are susceptible to a variety of fungal blights that are exacerbated by wet, cool springs. Symptoms include blackened, splotched foliage; dark, dried buds that never open; or streaked stems. Approved fungicides are



available and must be applied when the new shoots are 2 to 4 inches tall. Gardeners can increase air circulation and therefore reduce the chances of infection by spacing plants approximately 3 feet apart. It is important to plant in well-drained soil in full sun, practice good sanitation, and remove all dead foliage from the garden at the end of the season. So little effort for such heart-stopping beauty!

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Ideally, you should space your bulbs about 6 inches apart. If you're looking for a lush display, you can plant 4 inches apart. Use the chart below as a guide to the proper planting depth for each variety. For bulbs not listed on this chart, a general rule of thumb for planting depth is two to three times the height of the bulb. Tulips are generally planted 6 inches deep and daffodils are planted between 5 and 6 inches deep. Loosen the soil 2 to 3 inches below the approximate planting depth to allow for optimum root development. Firmly place each bulb in the hole with the pointed end upright. If it is difficult to determine which is the top of the bulb, plant it on its side; it will grow upward and perform normally.

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# How to Force a **Hyacinth Bulb**

For hyacinth bulbs to be successfully forced, the bulbs must be chilled for 13 weeks. If bulbs are not permitted to chill for the appropriate amount of time, they will not bloom. Forcing hyacinth bulbs to bloom indoors also requires the use of a well-drained potting medium. A suitable mixture of equal parts of peat, sand, and loamy soil works well. Do not add fertilizer to the mixture.

Use only clean pots that have adequate drainage holes. A good pot size is 4 to 8 inches in diameter. If you select a pot that has been used, be sure to clean it thoroughly to eliminate the spread of pathogens. If you use a clay pot, soak the pot in water overnight so that it does not pull moisture from the potting soil.

## **Planting Care of Forced Hyacinths**

Plant the bulbs between September and December, depending on when you want the flower to bloom. It takes a total of 16 weeks for the plant to bloom, including the chill time. Handle bulbs with caution. If you cannot plant the bulbs right away, put them in a brown paper bag and leave the bag open. Store the bulbs at a temperature of 45 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit (4 to 10 degrees Celsius). Bulbs will keep for up to three weeks if they are stored in proper conditions.

Fill your chosen container with at least 2 inches of planting medium. Do not pack the soil onto the bulb (keep it loose). Cover the bulb entirely. Plant one bulb in a 4-inch container, three bulbs in a 6-inch container, and more in larger

containers. Bulbs can be planted as close together as necessary.

Forcing hyacinths to bloom indoors can also be done in water. Choose a container without drainage holes that is between 3 and 5 inches deep. Fill the container halfway with clean pebbles and place the hyacinth flower bulbs atop this material so that they almost touch. Gently surround the bulbs with additional material to anchor them and add water until it reaches the bottom of the bulbs. Place the container in a cool, dark location for two weeks and then move to a warmer, sunny area. Replenish with water as needed.

## **Caring for Forced Hyacinth Flower Bulbs**

After the bulbs are planted, water them thoroughly so that the water drains out of the container's drainage holes. Place them in a cooler that is between 35 and 45 degrees (2 to 7 degrees). Keep the soil moist during the cooling period.

Roots will form and grow out of the holes in the bottom of the container after five or six weeks and shoots soon afterwards. Remove the bulbs from cold storage after 13 weeks. For best results, keep the plants in a room that is 60 degrees (16 degrees) and do not place the plant in direct sunlight.

It is not necessary to fertilize the bulb. Bulbs will bloom within three weeks of being taken out of cold storage.



# Forcing Spring Bulbs for Winter Color

Most spring-flowering bulbs require a cold period at 32 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit for eight to 16 weeks to stimulate flower formation. Many can be forced to flower in pots earlier than they would normally bloom by artificially creating winter for them. Good candidates for forcing include crocus, daffodils, hyacinths, tulips, scilla, and dwarf iris. Bulbs planted in early October can be readied for bloom in January, February, or later.

Be prepared to plant your bulbs immediately upon purchase and store them in a cool location. Use the vegetable bin of your refrigerator for a short time if you must, as high temperatures can cause the flower buds to fail. Do not keep bulbs where fruit is also stored, as ethylene gas from ripening fruit destroys flower buds.

Plant into 4- to 12-inch-wide bulb pans or azalea pots (shorter than standard flowerpots). Several small bulbs such as crocus or scilla, or a single large bulb, will fit into a 4-inch pot. Fill 6- to 12-inch containers with larger bulbs.

Place bulbs with their broad bases down and their noses pointing upward, neatly spaced apart or touching one another, in moist potting mix. If the flat side of a tulip bulb faces the side of the pot, its first leaves will gracefully droop over and camouflage the edge of the container.

Cover the bulbs with soil, filling the pot to 1 inch below its rim. Water thoroughly and drain well.

Several means of providing the required consistent cold include:

Bury them in a cold frame or in a hole in the garden; cover with 12 to 18 inches of mulch.

Place them in an unheated garage, storage shed, or cold cellar.

Store in a refrigerator (without fruit), but not in a freezer.

When the bulbs have filled the pot with roots, top growth will begin. Place the pot in cool, bright light indoors. Promote vertical growth by giving the pot a quarter-turn daily. Keep moist during the two to four weeks it takes for blossoms to appear.

When flowers fade, move the pot to an inconspicuous spot until the weather warms. Continue to water with diluted fertilizer until the leaves begin to fall over and yellow. At this time, you may wish to plant the bulbs in the garden to enjoy for many springs to follow.

Once bulbs have been forced the first time, they are less reliable for forcing again. Some of the hardy bulbs may perform well the second year after forcing if planted in a suitable outdoor location. Tulips probably will not perform well in the second year.



# Forcing **Amaryllis** in Soil

Amaryllis bulbs are usually potted up between October and February or March. If you don't wish to force a bulb immediately, keep it in the perforated plastic bag and store it away from light in a cool, dry, frost-free location (45 to 55 degrees Fahrenheit).

When you are ready to force the bulb, select a snug pot with a diameter of 1/2 to 1 inch larger than the bulb and with at least one drain hole. Add fresh potting soil until it is two-thirds full. With the tip up, place the bulb in the center of the container. Add additional soil for stabilization, leaving the top third of the bulb exposed. Water gently and **drain thoroughly**. Bulbs cannot tolerate wet feet!

Place the container in direct sunlight at room temperature (approximately 68 to 72 degrees Fahrenheit) to encourage blooming. Flowering should occur in four to six weeks.

Water sparingly—keeping the soil moist but **never** soggy—until the stem appears. Once a week should be sufficient. **Always drain thoroughly**.

When foliage and stems appear, occasionally rotate the pot to keep the stems from leaning toward the light.

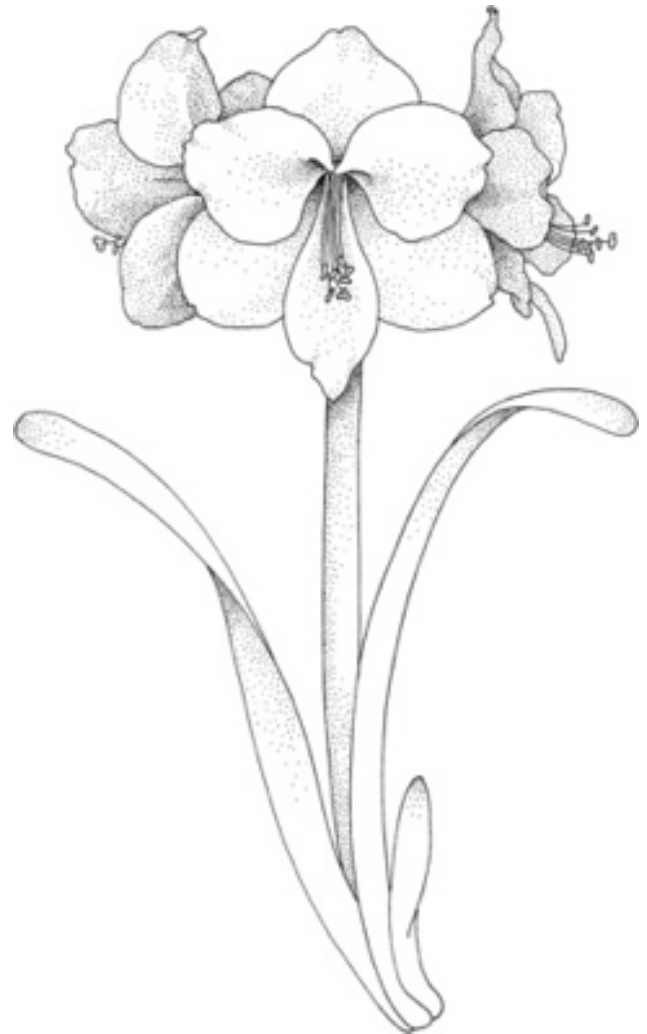
When buds appear and begin to color, move the plant to bright, but less direct, light. Cooler temperatures prolong bloom. Amaryllis produce multiple stems, each with multiple blooms.

After the flowers fade, cut stalks as close to the bulb as possible without removing the leaves. When the last flower has faded, you can choose to either discard the bulb or force the bulb to re-bloom.

The key to successfully having amaryllis bulbs re-bloom is their summer care after the first flowering. After all flowering stems have been removed and the leaves remain, store your bulb in the pot in indirect light, and water lightly once a month.

The plant can be left indoors in a sunny window. Or it can be moved outdoors after the threat of frost has passed, usually in late May or early June. If taken outdoors, it should be acclimated (or hardened off) to the outdoor temperatures, wind, and ultraviolet rays of the sun gradually, over a period of approximately one week. The plant should be placed in a semi-shaded location, watered when necessary, and fertilized once every two to three weeks with a general-purpose liquid fertilizer until it is brought back indoors.

Bring the pot indoors at the end of summer or early fall. Slowly withhold water until the leaves turn yellow to return the bulb to dormancy. Store the dormant bulb either in the pot or in a perforated bag, removing all old soil. When you are ready to start re-bloom, and after at least eight to ten weeks of resting in a cool, dry, frost-free location, repot the bulb, resume watering, and place it in a sunny spot at room temperature.



# How to Grow Foxtail Lily (*Eremurus*)

1. Handle the roots/tubers with care, as they are brittle and extremely fragile!

2. Plant *Eremurus* roots 6 inches deep and 12 to 15 inches apart. The crown should be just below the surface of the soil. Mark the planting site to make sure you do not accidentally damage the fragile roots when working in the garden.

4. Plant in full sun and consider that the foxtail lily can reach up to 7 feet in height. Place in a sunny spot toward back of your garden.

5. Plant in fertile, well-drained soil. Sandy soil enriched with compost is the best.

6. Dig a wide, shallow hole and plant with the pointed bud in the center facing upward.

7. Don't fold the roots/tubers to try to fit in the hole. Make sure the hole is wide enough to accommodate the roots. Do not break the tubers!

8. For winter protection, put mulch, straw, shredded leaves, and grass clippings (weed- and chemical-free) on top of the planted bulbs.

