



## The Bounty of Bulbs

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“Dig, drop, done” is the slogan that I frequently hear for bulbs. While it is not quite that simple, bulbs are a fairly easy way to beautify your garden. Many bulbs are perennial and therefore, can be left in the ground year-round. Although the bulbs will bloom the first spring after planting, many will naturally multiply and look better and better each year.

At some point, bulbs with naturalizing tendencies, like daffodils, will need to be dug up and separated. If you do not, they get so crowded that they send up many leaves but do not flower very much. I find it is hard to know where they were, but if you dig them up just when the leaves are rather withered and divide and replant them, it will not interfere with their growing cycle. Don't forget to throw in some bulb fertilizer in the bottom of the holes to give the bulbs a good boost. We always recommend a soil test to help zero in on optimal growing conditions for your plants.

Now there are two considerations to be aware of when planting bulbs. The first is proper depth. Instructions will generally be provided when bulbs are purchased. The second thing to be aware of is orientation. The roots need to be on the bottom and the growing tip on the top. Although the plant may still grow in an improperly planted orientation, it may not perform as well.

The thing I like most about bulbs is their easy to meet cultural requirements. Although there are some exceptions, most bulbs are generally put in the ground in the fall. This is a HUGE incentive for planting bulbs as there is usually not much going on in the garden at this time. As long as the ground is not frozen, you can plant. Bulbs must be planted before the ground freezes as they will not be good next year. Another option if you can't get them in the ground would be to then pot them up and force them.

Daffodils are by far my favorite bulb. There are many sizes and colors to choose from, and they are generally not eaten by anything. Many of our other beautiful bulbs may be eaten by deer and rabbits, moved by squirrels, or devoured by voles. Planting in a cage or slotted pot that is then planted in the ground is a good way to avoid the voles. If deer or rabbit pressure is heavy in your area, stick to the daffodils or plant in pots and place where pests cannot access them.

Planting bulbs can be time consuming. As such, there are some tools designed to make the job go quicker. My favorite tool is called a dibble or dibber. It is a “T” shaped tool with a point on the end that simply pokes a hole in the ground, but only works for the really small bulbs like grape hyacinths or dwarf irises.

The next tool seemed like it would be amazing. Simply called a bulb planter, it is a round cylinder-shaped tool with a handle on the top. It works by shoving it into the ground, and then you pull it and the soil out, leaving a hole. Drop the bulb in and then press the handle and the soil will fall back into the hole. I never found this to work too well. The soil either will not come out, or if it does it is a big clump that needs to be chopped up with a shovel anyway. Also, the hole is generally not deep enough, and it is hard to push into the soil.

Naturally when I found there was a standup version of the bulb planter, I got excited. You push it into the ground with your foot. Unfortunately, the same problems exist as with the handheld.

The planting auger is a tool that hooks up to your cordless drill. The advantages of this are the speed at which you can drill holes and the ease of depth control. The holes are an ideal size for larger bulbs like tulips and daffodils. The hazard of this tool is that if you hit a rock, the auger stops, and the drill keeps going potentially injuring the user. The auger shaft may also break saving the auger but shortening it. I have used augers with success, but I brace for rock impact and generally go through many of them. Unless you are planting a field worth of bulbs, I would just stick to a small handheld shovel or trowel. Plant bulbs now for a beautiful spring!

For your gardening questions, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at [www.ladybug.uconn.edu](http://www.ladybug.uconn.edu) or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.



