



# Growing Bulbs



about bulbs...  
selecting and planting...  
forcing...  
depth/height chart ...  
and more!

[www.sloatgardens.com](http://www.sloatgardens.com)

## Interesting Facts About Bulbs

**B**ulbs have a long, rich history, having been cultivated for thousands of years. Art, literature, philosophy, and botany from ancient Crete, Egypt, Greece, Rome, and biblical times are replete with bulb motifs and references. History's first recorded horticultural craze was "tulipomania" in the early 17th century, when tulips originating in Turkey made their way to the Netherlands where they became wildly popular; their possession became the ultimate status symbol, and stock-market-like trading and speculation reached a frenzy before it crashed. Fortunately, Holland's bulb industry not only survived but thrived; it has given us thousands of outstanding hybrids, and continues to supply a major part of the world demand.

Botanically, bulbs are actually modified stems surrounded by fleshy leaves. Therefore, what most of us refer to collectively as bulbs may be true bulbs, corms, tubers, rhizomes, or tuberous roots. All have one thing in common: They are highly efficient food storage bins in which a plant gathers and holds nutrients, then draws on the stored food to start active growth after its season of dormancy. A perfect spring flower is already nestled within the sleek brown jacket of each tulip or daffodil you plant this fall.

In addition to being fascinating and not a little magical, bulbs are easy for even inexperienced gardeners to grow successfully. By following a few simple rules, you can grow a spectacular display of spring blooming bulbs.

## Selecting & Growing Bulbs

**CHOOSE** bulbs that are firm and large. Look for "double noses" on daffodils. The quantity of flowers and the quality of the blooms are the result of the bulbs you select this fall. Fall is the time to purchase and plant your spring blooming bulbs.

**OCTOBER** is ideal for planting those bulbs that don't require pre-chilling. Soil temperatures are cooling and winter rains are around the corner. Most bulbs can be planted directly in the ground using Sloat Forest Mulch Plus, or in pots using Sloat Potting Soil. There are a few exceptions in our mild winter climate.

PLANT WATER GROW

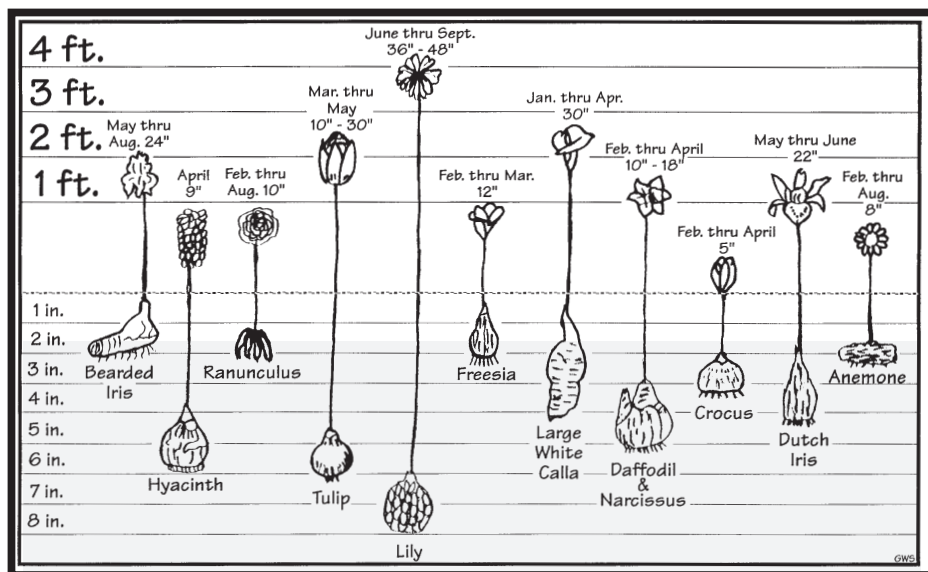
**CHILLING** is required for tulips, hyacinths, crocus and freesia in order for their stems to elongate sufficiently. Place these bulbs in the refrigerator for 4 to 6 weeks (not the freezer). Be sure they are not stored with apples which release ethylene that inhibits sprouting! Plant them the same day you remove them from the refrigerator. Paperwhite Narcissus do not require chilling but can be “stalled” with refrigeration.

**LATE NOVEMBER** or December is a great time to plant chilled bulbs (but even January is not too late). Ideally, all bulbs should be planted by the 1st of January.

**PREPARE** your soil to ensure good drainage. Use plenty of Sloat Planting Mix or Forest Mulch Plus. Add Bone Meal or E.B. Stone Bulb Food to supply extra nutrition.

**PLANT** bulbs with their “points” up (Ranunculus are planted “toes” down). If you can’t tell which end should be up, bulbs planted on their sides still come up. A good rule of thumb is to plant at a depth equal to twice the bulbs height.

**IN CONTAINERS**, plant as shallow as possible to allow for good root growth. Bulbs should be close together but not touching. Tulips should be planted so that the “flat” side is facing the edge of the pot.



## GOT SHADE?

Most bulbs want full sun to grow well. If you have only partly shady spots, however, here are some bulbs that will perform beautifully!

- |  |                             |
|--|-----------------------------|
| <i>Allium giganteum</i> (Giant Allium)   | <i>Zantedeschia</i> (Calla) |
| <i>Amaryllis belladonna</i> (Naked Lady) | Bearded Iris                |
| <i>Anemone</i> (Windflower)              | Asian Lily                  |
| <i>Freesia</i> (Freesia)                 | Oriental Lily               |
| <i>Fritillaria</i> (Fritillary)          |                             |
| <i>Narcissus</i> (Paper White)           |                             |

## Forcing Bulbs

“Forcing” is such a harsh word for a process that results in such a delightful product! Forcing is actually coaxing spring-flowering bulbs into blooming ahead of schedule to fill a winter room with color and fragrance.

The easiest bulbs to force are hyacinths and narcissus. For a dramatic presentation, place the bulbs in a hyacinth vase (keep water just touching the bulb’s base and add a piece of activated charcoal) or nestle bulbs in a 3”-4” deep container filled with pebbles. Keep water level at the bulbs’ base.

Set the container in a cool, dark place until it fills with roots, then move it to a cool, bright spot. Narcissus will bloom about 6 weeks after planting, hyacinth in 8 to 12 weeks. Begin in October and plant at 2 week intervals, and have flowering narcissus indoors over a 2 month period.

More difficult but equally rewarding are tulips, daffodils, and crocus. For these, fill a flower pot half full of Sloat Potting Soil (do not press down). Fill the pot with as many bulbs as possible without quite letting the bulbs actually touch each other. Set tulip bulbs with their flat side facing outward. Sprinkle more soil between the bulbs until just their tips are showing. Soak thoroughly. Place in a cool, dark place (40°- 50°F) for eight to twelve weeks.

Water as needed to keep the soil just slightly damp. After the initial treatment, move the bulbs to a cool but strongly lighted location. The cooler the spot the better the quality and longer lasting the flowers. Keep the bulbs damp at all times. Flowering will occur within a few weeks.

Great plants and great advice to help them grow!  
 San Francisco, Marin, Contra Costa counties  
 Revised October 2016