



Tend early blooms properly for years of bright color

AP —The bulbs that flower in spring — small ones such as crocus, squill and snowdrops, and the larger tulips, daffodils and narcissus — will provide bright color in your garden year after year if tended properly after they bloom.

In a naturalized setting planted under deciduous trees or shrubs, small spring-flowering bulbs, including grape hyacinth, winter aconite and Spanish bluebells, will continue to flower for many years.

They'll mature before overhead trees and shrubs leaf out so they will store enough food to produce the next year's flowers.

The same holds true when small or large bulbs are naturalized in the lawn or meadow, but it is important that the tops are not mowed until they have begun to dry or they will not flower well the next spring.

When naturalized, the bulbs, large and small, will increase in number if the tops are allowed to mature.

REMOVING SPENT flowers prevents them from going to seed and sapping bulb strength needed to produce the next season's flowers, according to the Netherlands FlowerBulb Information Center.

In cultivated beds with well-prepared soil, it is possible to plant annual flowers between the bulbs while the foliage is still fresh. Be careful not to damage the bulbs.

Plant annuals between them to hide the dying bulb plant foliage until it is mature enough to remove and destroy. The annuals also will shade the soil,

keeping it cool and providing a better environment for bulbs to develop.

Another option is to dig the bulbs after the foliage dies back and store them for replanting in fall. Place them in a cool, dry, well-ventilated place such as a garage or basement until fall planting time.

Cutting back tulip bulb foliage while it's still green could lead to bulb rot, often a reason why bulbs do not reappear the second year.

Test bulbs for maturity while they're in the ground by grasping the foliage and giving it a slight twist. When it comes loose easily, the bulb is ready for lifting and storing.

Before the spring-flowering bulbs end their color parade, think of adding more brightness with summer-blooming bulbs such as popular dahlias and gladioli.

OTHERS RECOMMENDED by the Flower Bulbs Center include:

Poppy anemone, grown from a shriveled, raisin-like tuber. Soak tubers overnight before planting in full sun or partial shade in well-drained soil.

Plant at least four inches apart, one-two inches deep. Plantings 10 days apart will prolong the flowering period. Flowers, two-four inches in diameter, are purple-blue, red, rose or white, on 24-inch tall stems good for garden display or cutting.

Oxalis, a prodigious bloomer, has shamrock-like leaves. Plant in full sunlight six inches apart in one inch of soil. They do best in slightly acid soil.

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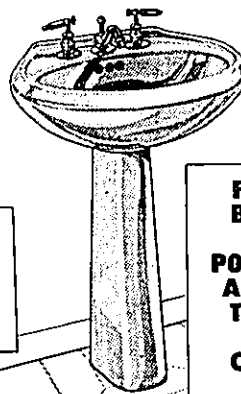
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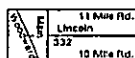
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