

GARDEN SPOT

Use bulbs to brighten garden



MARTY FIGLEY

Yep, it's that time again to get spring-flowering bulbs in the ground so that our gardens will soon greet us with color. By choosing bulbs for sequence of bloom, we can enjoy snowdrops in early February to Dutch Iris in July. We can't always predict exactly when they will bloom.

The history of bulbs is ancient. In 1590, Carolus Clusius, a famous botanist of the day who lived in Vienna, established a botanic garden at the University of Leiden in Holland, where he grew all manner of bulbs. The people went nuts to see such plants! Unfortunately Clusius was stingy and wouldn't share his bulbs, and soon the people raided his garden and stole the bulbs. This may have started the tulip toward its commercial success.

At first, only the wealthy could afford bulbs and fortunes were made and lost on them. Some speculators bought bulbs still in the ground and traded those that never existed. Now, however, we can all enjoy these interesting and beautiful flowers.

Growers have been harvesting the bulbs and are now shipping them to their outlets and the little "storage tanks" are just waiting to settle into their garden place. As the temperatures indicate they'll begin their growing season after their winter dormant period.

Advice

The Netherlands Flower Bulb Association gives the following advice:

- Plant spring flowering bulbs in September, October or November, before the first hard frost. It is wise to plant the bulbs soon after purchase to prevent them from drying out.

- Choose a sunny or shady site (the trees and shrubs won't be fully leafed out before the flowers bloom, nor will perennials be tall enough to shade them).

- Plant the same variety or color for the biggest impact; 10 to 15 tulips, seven to 10 hyacinths, 25 to 30 crocuses.

- Bulbs need well-drained soil. If the soil is clay, incorporate sand, sphagnum peat or compost into the bed; they need no additional fertilizer at this time.

- A rule of thumb for depth of planting is to plant the bulbs twice their own depth. Or, large bulbs (i.e. daffodils,

tulips and hyacinth), the lower end of the bulb should be five to seven inches down; smaller bulbs, such as snowdrop and crocus, three inches down.

- After planting the bulbs, keep the soil moist, especially during dry periods.

- For continuous bloom, choose the following:

February/March - Snowdrop, *Galanthus*; Winter aconite, *Eranthis*; *Iris reticulata*; *Anemone blanda*; the many varieties of Crocus; *Puschkinia*; *Daffodils*; *Scilla siberica* and Spring snowflake, *Leucojum vernum*.

April/May - Tulips, Triumph and Darwin-hybrid, Lily-flowering and Parrot; Daffodils; Grape hyacinth, *Muscari*; Crown imperial, *Fritillaria imperialis*; Hyacinth; Ornamental onion, *Allium*; Star of Bethlehem, *Ornithogalum*; and Summer snowflake, *Leucojum aestivum*.

And in July you'll still see the *Alliums*, Bluebell, *Scilla campanulata* as well as the Dutch Iris.

Selection

Study books and catalogs to assure a long sequence of bloom. Unfortunately, all authors don't agree on information, so sometimes you may have to experiment to find out what works in your garden.

Choose bulbs that are firm, without blemishes. The dry skin won't be a problem if it has sloughed off.

Do buy bulbs from a company that propagates in their facility. For a copy of a brochure, just published by the American Horticulture Society and Fauna and Floral International, which lists those companies that have pledged either to never sell or to clearly label any bulbs that have been collected in the wild, send your name and address with \$1 for shipping and handling to: The Good Bulb Guide, AHS, 7931 E. Boulevard Drive, Alexandria, Va. 22308.

If you would like a brochure, "Color All Year Long with Dutch Flower Bulbs," send a business-size, stamped



MARTY FIGLEY

Show of snowdrops: Snowdrops bloom profusely in the gardens at Cranbrook.

envelope to me at The Observer & Eccentric, 805 E. Maple, Birmingham 48009.

TIMELY GARDEN TIPS

- Divide those perennials that bloomed in the summer.
- Don't put weeds in the compost now, unless it is really hot and cooking.
- Oct. 12 is the traditional day to plant garlic in the North.
- To encourage earthworms to dig deeper in the soil (better aeration), mulch lightly.
- Plant bulbs en masse for a greater impact.

Marty Figley is an advanced master gardener based in Birmingham. You can leave her a message by dialing (313) 953-2047 on a touch-tone phone, then her mailbox number, 1859. Her fax number is (810) 644-1314.

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