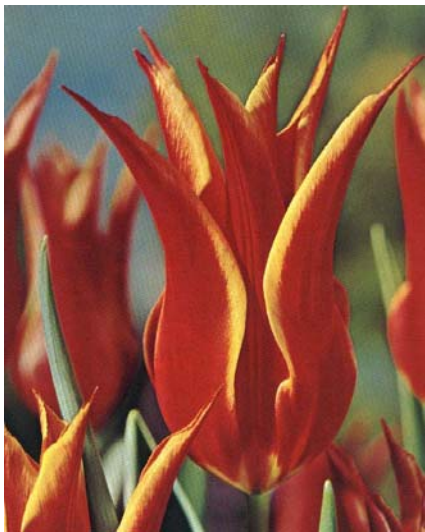


Long ago I learned that some things in life one can't avoid. They're often referred to as the facts of life. One fact of life is that autumn has now officially arrived; today's article is devoted to one related fact of life.

If one desires beautiful flowering spring bulbs gracing one's landscape next spring, the fact is one must plant those bulbs now. The great part — flowering bulbs are easy to grow and colorfully rewarding. Planting bulbs in the fall garden is not only pleasurable, but it certainly can bring out the hidden designer in all of us. One's imagination can run wild, and even the most unskilled gardener can create a breathtaking and beautiful spring garden with bulbs.



Keep in mind: those bulbs planted in the fall are hardy bulbs. Hardy bulbs are capable of surviving Nebraska's winters. Major contenders in this group include alliums, crocus, daffodils, hyacinths, and tulips and a multitude of minor bulbs such as anemones, scillas, and muscari.



One might question why these bulbs need to be planted in the fall. The fact is autumn brings shorter days and cooler temperatures. As the soil begins to cool, it stimulates spring flowering bulbs to develop their roots. For quality flowers in the spring, the roots of bulbs must be fully established before winter sets in and the ground freezes. That is why it is best to plant bulbs as soon as possible after purchasing. Attempt to plant bulbs by the end of October. If one is unable to plant them immediately, keep them dry and cool, around 50° F. to 60° F. For longer storage periods, a refrigerator might help, but keep bulbs away from ripening fruit. Ethylene gas is emitted by ripening fruit and can interfere with a bulb's flowering ability. The key is planting bulbs as soon as possible.

When selecting bulbs, the choices are nearly unlimited. Deciding on a color scheme, time of flowering and flower height are major considerations. Once these decisions are made, purchase only healthy, firm bulbs from reliable providers.

Where and how to plant the bulbs is the next decision. Most spring flowering bulbs prefer sunshine. However, keep in mind, in early spring, sunshine is abundant. When spring flowering bulbs are in bloom, other deciduous plants such as trees and shrubs are void of leaves. Furthermore, most bulbs have a very short leaf period before they die back and go dormant, so the decision of where to plant is nearly unlimited.

A bulb is a complete plant factory with built-in nourishment; if healthy, it is guaranteed to bloom at least once. Should one wish to have the bulb bloom in future years, select a planting site where the soil is rich in organic matter and well drained.

Planting is easy. Since most commercial growers have the planting instructions printed on the package, simply follow their directions.

A few other planting tips include the following:

- Plant low-growing bulbs, such as muscari (grape hyacinths), in front of taller flowers, such as tulips or daffodils.
- For big impact, always plant bulbs in groups, either in small clusters or large beds. A single flower standing alone is not very dramatic.
- Consider planting scattered clusters of early-flowering bulbs, such as crocus and daffodils, throughout one's lawn or wooded area to achieve a natural look.

For more detailed information, check out this website.

<http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/epublic/live/g1742/build/g1742.pdf>

On this site an excellent Neb-Guide entitled *Spring Flowering Bulbs* is published by the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

Lastly, experiment. Pick a flower bulb variety on a whim and try a small planting. If it does well, add more next fall. The fact of life — now is the time to plant spring flowering bulbs.