

Last week we looked at one of the first spring flowering plants, daffodils. I thought that this week I would continue with the theme of spring and take a look at tulips. To some gardeners, they might be worth their weight in gold for their variety of colors and forms but at one point in history, tulip bulbs were paid for by weight in gold. I'll also take a look at what kinds of tulips there are, and where they should be planted.

Although Holland in the Netherlands is known for tulips today, they are actually native to the mountain ranges in Asia. They were first brought to Holland around 1600 by a botanist. This botanist refused to sell or share any of the bulbs. The story goes that some of the bulbs were stolen from him, creating the Dutch tulip industry. The rarity and beauty of the tulips created a high demand with a low supply available. They very quickly became a status symbol for the rich, who were the only people who were able to afford them. As the price increased, they were sold by weight instead of by bulb. A dozen bulbs would sell for over a thousand dollars. Around 1640, the market for tulips crashed. The economy couldn't support how high the prices had become. Thankfully, the prices today are much more reasonable.

Unfortunately the prices being reasonable doesn't make it any easier to choose between the different varieties of tulip. There are the type of tulip with simple petals that most people think of when they think of tulips, but there are several other types of tulips. There are parrot type tulips that have fringed edges all the way around the petal, and most are multicolored. They can come in yellows and reds, whites and pinks, red and white, and many others besides. They really do look like parrots with their feathers and bright colors. There are multi-flowering tulips, which have multiple blooms per stem, and work very well for bouquets. Fringed tulips that have fringe along the edge of the petals. They're quite a bit more subtle than the parrot tulips. My personal favorite are the double flowering tulips which have extra petals. They have such a different look than a classic tulip that I find my eyes drawn to them every time. The last type of tulip are called lily flowering tulips. They have differently shaped petals that resemble lily petals, but they don't change the shape of the flower much, so they have these bulb shaped flowers that are very attractive. Adding to the difficulty of choosing a tulip is that tulips come in almost every color of the rainbow, and many color combinations. But choosing the flowers that will look the best in your landscape might be part of the fun too.

It's too late to plant tulips this year and still have them flower. They are best planted before the ground freezes in October. They should be planted in a location that receives at least six hours of direct sun every day, and the soil should be well drained, because bulbs are prone to rot when they sit in damp locations for too long.

Tulip popularity started in Holland around 1600, where tulips were seen as a status symbol. The prices for bulbs kept increasing until the market was no longer sustainable, and it crashed. Tulips today are much more widely available. Tulips come in several different types of flowers, simple flowers, parrot type, multi-flowering, fringed, double flowers, and lily type flowers. It's too late to plant bulbs this year, they need to be planted in the fall, somewhere with at least partial sun and a well-drained soil. If you have any questions or would like to suggest a topic for me to write about, feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or mearnest2@unl.edu.