

## Fall Bulb Planting for Spring Show

By Joyce Friels, Bell County Master Gardener

When the warming sun shines through your window in late February, and you look out to see your neighbor's yard sparkling with pretty yellow and white daffodils interspersed with pretty pink tulips, you say to yourself, "Daffodils and tulips always remind me of grandma's yard back home in the spring. Aren't they pretty. I wish they were in my yard." Well, they can be come next spring! Spring flowers bring color and excitement to a landscape after a bland, boring winter. There are many ways to design a bed of spring blooming bulbs. Decide on the place and the size of the area you want to devote to bulbs. Spring bulbs love to surprise you with their bright blooms when placed under deciduous trees where they can soak up the warming spring soil and sun. When planted in front of dark green shrubbery or a fence they really stand out. Keep in mind that these bulbs can be planted in flower beds that are already established. If you have a flower bed by the front door or in the center of the yard, you can probably find room to plant a few daffodils, hyacinths, or narcissus. They don't require a large area and they will make quite a splash in March and April. Spring bloomers also look great planted in containers sitting on a sunny patio or front step.

Some spring blooming bulbs that do well in Central Texas are: Allium (flowering Onion), Anemone, Crocus, Starch Hyacinth (*Muscari racemosum*), Dutch Iris, Louisiana Iris, Bearded Iris, Easter Lily, Leucojum (Snowflake), Narcissus, Ranunculus, Spring Starflower, Sisyrinchium (Blue-eyed Grass), Lady Tulip (*Tulipa clusiana*), and Zantedeschia (Calla Lily). Tulips and hyacinths enjoy the cold temperatures of northern states. Therefore, tulips and hyacinths found in most nurseries should be considered annuals in our area because our winters do not get cold enough to keep them happy. If you decide to try tulips or hyacinths, refrigerate the bulbs four to six week before planting. On Christmas Eve, one year, I planted tulip bulbs and some of them came up the next spring. I also discovered that squirrels love to eat tulip bulbs but they don't like daffodils! By looking through any fall garden magazine or catalog, you will discover bulbs to suit nearly every garden spot. Order those bulbs that you saw in that garden catalog that you liked. You don't know if they will grow in your yard? Well, experiment, try it! Be bold! try tulips one year. You may be surprised and the envy of the neighbors!

The fall season, November and December, is the time to plant bulbs that will bloom next spring. If you have purchased spring bulbs at a local home center you will need to keep the bulbs in a cool dry place until it is time to plant them. If you order bulbs from a nursery outside of Texas, the nursery will send them to you at the proper planting time. When they arrive, unpack the bulbs and if they can't be planted right away, place them in cool dry place until they can be put into the ground. It's best not to keep them too long. So preparation and planning is the key to having a spring show of colorful blooms. All spring blooming bulbs should be in the ground no later than the second week of December.

To give you a spectacular show, plant the bulbs fairly close together in groups. Planting directions are listed on each package of bulbs and should be followed exactly. Plant low growing bulbs such as crocuses and grape hyacinths in front of taller bulbs such as tulips and daffodils. You can use one color, two colors, or many colors depending on the look you want to convey. If a variety of colors is used, add some white blooms, like narcissus or snow drops, to give the bed some continuity.

Plant bulbs in well drained beds because a soggy bed will rot the bulbs. Bulbs don't need soil that retains moisture because they don't root deeply. If you are planting them in newly dug beds with poor soil, amend the soil with compost or sand. It is not necessary to fertilize bulbs but it will help bulbs planted in new beds. Add a small amount of a slow release fertilizer at the bottom of each hole before putting in the bulb. Cover with soil and then put on a good layer of mulch to keep them from a hard freeze. By the end of February or early March, you will look out your window and see the first glimpse of yellow! Oh! It is an exciting time!

Planning, proper preparation of new beds, selecting a variety of bulbs, following planting directions,

and planting at the proper time of year, will give you "grandma's yard" that you can enjoy every day next spring!