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Bulb Flowers Signal that Spring is Approaching

It's about time for spring bulbs to begin showing their foliage and flowers, which is a good natural signal of the changing of seasons. Bulbs, like trees and shrubs, should be planted in the fall for root growth to be stimulated by warmer soil temperatures. Bulbs can be purchased at local hardware stores and garden centers. Tulips, daffodils, hyacinths, crocuses, and bluebells are among the most commonly planted spring bulb flowers. While bulbs are commonly associated with spring, there are also some species that flower in the summer or fall. These include dahlia, gladiolus, crocus, amaryllis, and alliums.

Many people consider bulbs set-it-and-forget-it plants, and that is true for the most part – bulbs store energy in the bases of leaves or modified stems to use year after year for emergence and flowering. However, fertilizing bulbs can lengthen the lifespan of your bulbs and help them produce larger flowers in future growing seasons. Bulb roots begin dying as flowers form, so fertilizer applied during flowering will go to waste. Instead, apply a liquid fertilizer mix to the soil as the foliage begins to emerge from the soil. There will be no noticeable difference this year, but its effects will be apparent when the bulbs bloom next year. It is important to not overfertilize as this can cause growth issues. Take a soil test to determine whether fertilization is necessary in your soil, and what nutrients you should add.

Many people think that bulbs are roots. However, bulbs are just one form of modified stem. The bulbous part of the plant is a set of modified leaves that store nutrients and water for survival when the plant enters dormancy. These leaves are expanded at their bases and grow outward before the bulb enters dormancy. Other plants often considered roots are also modified stems. These include rhizomes and tubers. Because bulbs are leaves, smaller bulbs called bulbils can form on a leaf's axillary buds. This often happens with allium species such as chives and garlic. These bulbils can be used to vegetatively propagate new plants from old bulbs through rooting in potting media.

Bulbs can be used anywhere in the garden. Most bulbs are traditionally grouped together in clumps or in borders. As flowering plants, most bulbs require a sunny location but some will also grow well in the shade. Bluebells, daylilies and allium species are three examples of bulbs that tolerate moderately shady positions in your garden. Because bulbs are buried underground, they are some of the most susceptible plants to rot. Make sure that the drainage in your soil is good enough that water will not pool on days with heavy rain. If drainage is an issue, you can mound soil to raise the elevation of bulb plantings in order to improve drainage.

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