

Sarah Denkler  
Horticulture Specialist  
April 24, 2011

## Spring Bulbs

So the spring bulbs have inspired us with their blooms and now frustrate those responsible for mowing with their plain green leaves. Now what?

Although it is extremely tempting to cut down those leaves, avoid it for now. Allow the plants to photosynthesize so they may produce and store new food reserves for next spring. Spent flowers should be removed to prevent the production of seed which will further reduce energy in the bulbs. One great way to keep leaves from being annoying is to plant spring bulbs in landscape beds where other flowers will fill in as the spring bloom dies down. In this way the leaves are part of the bed design instead of a random leaf in your yard.

Daffodils, also called paper whites to some and Narcissus to others, are bright yellow to white bulbs that breathe life into spring. Bulbs are planted about 6 inches deep in the soil profile and will provide lasting brilliance without replanting if you space them at least 6 inches apart. In this way they can multiply with enough space to prevent overcrowding for some time. If you plant them closer you will have to dig and divide them again in three years to prevent desiccation of bulbs. When spaced properly watch for signs of smaller blooms or compact and dense leaf growth to determine when to divide and replant. After blooming in the spring daffodils' leaves should be left alone for 2 months before removing them from the landscape.

Tulips are not naturalized for colder climates so are often treated as annuals in Missouri. They can be dug up each year and stored after bloom. However, they will eventually lose the energy required to re-bloom and need replacement. Bulbs can be left in the ground from year to year to see what will reappear. If they are planted in a location that provides at least 6 hours of sun each day and protected from the cold they will often re-bloom for many years. The biggest concern, other than cold, is in animal pests that may use the bulbs for food. Some will plant bulbs in a wire mesh or place bulbs in a raised bed as a way to prevent them from being eaten by rodents. Bulbs should be planted around 8 inches deep and 6 to 8 inches apart. They seldom need to be divided as they usually fail to re-bloom before they become overcrowded.

Grape hyacinth is a small flowering bulb that is usually planted about 4 inches deep. These are better when planted in small clumps as their small size and purple to blue color sometimes makes it hard to notice in a spring landscape. Once established they will spread quickly and can become naturalized. Saving foliage is not as crucial both because the foliage appears ahead of bloom and because it is so small that it may avoid the mower when planted in the yard. This small bulb will do well in sun or shade.

As each of the above mentioned plants blooms in spring it is best to plant or divide and replant during the fall. As it is usually hard to find where they are planted in the fall, you may dig and divide them when it is alright to remove leaves, lay flat to dry and then store them in a cool, dark area until ready to replant in spring. Planting should be done by October in order to provide sufficient time to regenerate roots for the following spring. Soil should be loose and well drained. Compact, clay soil does not provide enough air to prevent bulb rot and should not be used for bulbs. Watering is usually not an issue as the leaves are present during the spring when adequate moisture is present.

Although Surprise lilies don't provide bloom in spring their leaves come up just as early as daffodils. If patience persists, their foliage will die during the first warm days of late spring and disappear in May. Their bloom appears in fall which makes it easy to find them when you are ready to divide and transplant. Fertilizers are not necessary but if you wish, add N, P and K when you plant or replant using half a cup per 10 plants. This is the same application rate that can be used for tulips and daffodils.

Bulbs are a low maintenance way for new gardeners to gain confidence as well as a great way to make friends when you need to divide and transplant. Everyone likes to share bulbs.

*Source: Trinklein, David. Spring Flowering Bulbs: Daffodils. Publication G6610. University of Missouri Extension. Rev. June 2007.*

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