

The Garden Corner

By: Art Kammerlohr

Master Gardeners of Johnson County Missouri

Heard a conversation the other day and it went something like this: “My daffodils aren’t blooming the way the use to.” “Yeah, and most of my tulips haven’t come back from last year.” While there are a number of reasons for lackluster blooming power from both of these early spring flowers, you can bet the decreased performance has a lot to do with proper care and selection. Let us take the problems with tulips first since it is the easiest to solve.

While the care and feeding of your tulips will be the same as what you do for your daffodils, the most prevalent mistake most folks make is not buying the correct type. If you want your tulips to return every year and multiply then ensure the package lists them as either Darwin hybrids or perennials. In our area, these are the only types of tulips that will consistently return year after year. When caring for both daffodils and tulips, there are a few things to keep in mind.

When first planting your bulbs, go to the extra effort to incorporate bone meal into the soil. Bone meal is comprised of calcium and phosphorus and will promote a healthy plant and root structure. Plant your bulbs in the fall – the earlier the better. If you have problems with squirrels digging up your newly planted bulbs you can lay chicken coop wire over your plantings to deter the little pesky critters. Early the following spring a generous application of fertilizer will promote the current year’s development and the plants will appreciate your attentive care. Your next task is to cut the flowering stalks once the blooms have faded. Now, we get to the part of the process that most folks don’t pay any attention too: Leaving the remaining foliage alone! Let it die back on its own – don’t cut the green leafs because they are collecting the sun’s energy and storing it in next year’s bulbs to provide all that wonderful spring color. Most gardeners are a “tidy” bunch of people and as soon as the blooms are done they go through and whack the plants to the ground thereby eliminating the eye sore of wilting leafs. If the yellowing of the leaves bothers you then develop the habit of scattering your bulbs among other perennials whose growth will conceal the unsightly mess. There’s one last thing to consider: If your bulbs have been in the same location for four or five years, you may want to dig them up and split and spread them out to prevent overcrowding.

Try these suggestions and you’ll see a difference. For questions and/or comments about this or any other topic write to: 370 NW 121 Rd., Warrensburg, MO 64093 or email to: mandpak@embarqmail.com and I’ll get back with you.