



ASK A MASTER GARDENER

GROWING TULIPS IN SOUTH PLACER COUNTY

By Trish Grenfell, Placer County Master Gardener

Q I just got a pot of beautiful tulips for Valentine's Day, but I have no clue what I should do with them. I would like to plant them in my yard for future years. Where should I put them? What do they need?

A They should rebloom in your yard if you follow all my directions, but be aware that success rates differ from cultivar to cultivar. And the old-fashioned species tulips are more forgiving and more likely to rebloom.

Enjoy your potted tulips now, keeping them moderately wet with good drainage. (Note: your plant was probably forced to bloom and won't rebloom until next spring in your yard.) The foliage will eventually start to die back. You can cut off the spent flowers, but don't remove any leaves while they are still green. When they are completely yellow, you can tug the leaves off the bulbs and throw them away.

Next, allow the pot to dry out. They need to go dormant during the summer and if you water them, they will rot and die. This year keep them dry in the pot until chilling time. What you do next year depends on whether or not you planted them in an area that receives summer water. If the planting area is wet in the summer, harvest the bulbs before summer, allowing them to stay dry. If the planting area is dry, dig up the bulbs (separating the new bulblets) in late summer/early fall—in time to prechill and replant in November.

Tulips require help in setting flower buds here because we cannot count on 6-10 weeks of consecutive winter temperatures of 40°F or below. Therefore, pre-chill the bulbs for 6-10 weeks in a refrigerator crisper just before you plant. Be sure not to store any apples or other fruits alongside your bulbs. Ripening fruit give off methylene gas which will kill the flower inside the bulbs. Go directly from refrigerator to pre-dug holes on planting day.

The best time to plant here is between Halloween & Thanksgiving. Plant 6" deep in an area which receives full sun during the blooming period. Tulips prefer rich, sandy soil, but they will do well in any soil as long as it drains fast. A shovel of compost before you plant works wonders. And you can also improve results using a complete fertilizer (such as 5-10-10) worked into the top 12" of the planting area. Water very well when planting and then leave them alone until spring.

If you forgot to fertilize in the fall, you may do so in the spring. Regular water is required during the growing and blooming period.

Be aware that many gardeners just buy new bulbs each fall, chill them for 6-10 weeks, and plant between Halloween and Thanksgiving.

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