



SPRING COLOR STARTS NOW

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When gardeners think of spring color, our thoughts immediately turn to masses of tulips, hyacinths and daffodils, but our gardens can provide many other blooming surprises if we look deeper into the world of spring bulbs.

Tulips and Hyacinths

Have you planted tulips, loved them the first year and then wondered what happened in the following years? Most daffodils will naturalize in local gardens, returning year after year, but hybrid tulips and hyacinths require more hours of winter chilling than our climate provides, so any repeat bloom is disappointing or nonexistent.

Foothill gardeners should consider tulips and hyacinths as annuals and replant them each year, if you must have them. Planting these bulbs in pots can give your garden punch and make later disposal of the bulbs easier. There are however, many other spring bulbs that will thrive in our gardens and return to greet us every year in increasing numbers.

Here are some bulbs to consider that will whisper in your ear just about the time you yearn for new green, growing things and that will burst into bloom welcoming spring weather.

So many choices...

Alliums (ornamental onions), amaryllis, peonies, fritillarias, Dutch irises, and watsonias can add color and a counterpoint of height in your garden.

On the other hand, for a more delicate look, consider crocus, freesias (fragrance a wonderful bonus), ixias, leucojums, lycoris, montbretias, muscari (grape hyacinths), paperwhites, ranunculus, snowdrops, sparaxis, or dog-tooth violets.

These minor bulbs are small, short plants that are used in informal, massed plantings for greatest effect. They will naturalize and increase year after year.

Planting Bulbs

Plant bulbs where they will get at least 6 hours of sun a day and prepare your planting site before putting in your bulbs. Mix in generous amounts of compost to the depth that the bulbs will be planted.

Be sure that there is adequate drainage, especially if bulbs are planted in a bed where other plants will get summer water. Spring flowering bulbs are dormant in summer and do not like wet feet. If you can provide them a dry summer experience, they will appreciate it. If they must share a bed with plants that need water, try to plant them at the edges where it may be drier.

Some bulbs, especially crocus, Chionodoxa, and lilies, are eaten by squirrels, gophers, and other diggers. If you have a problem with these pests, consider using a wire cage to protect your bulbs. Also, if you are planting in garden or landscape accessible to deer, consider deer-resistant bulbs.

Now, go out and find a few new bulbs to plant this fall. You can look at your local nursery, in your favorite bulb catalog or online to see the shapes and colors available to you. Then plant your treasures and watch for them next spring. Your anticipation may almost make the winter weather tolerable.

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