

Naturalizing Bulbs

Naturalizing provides a plant with a preferred set of conditions, allowing it to thrive in the same spot year after year. This is quite easy to achieve with bulbs.

Naturalizing also refers to the random manner in which bulbs grow in the wild—a more challenging task. We have listed a few tips on how to imitate nature so that your bulbs will last forever.

IMITATING NATURE'S WAY OF PLANTING

For a convincing drift of daffodils under a large tree, start with about 50 bulbs, you'll find almost the same number of cards in a deck. Play a game of '50 pick-up' with the wind and send the cards scattering off, plant a bulb wherever a card lands. Another method is to simply scatter the bulbs themselves, a method suited to small areas.

FOUR SIMPLE STEPS TO PLANTING BULBS

It is always important to plant a bulb properly, particularly when you want the bulb to live there for many years.

1. Prepare a small hole, digging deeper than the required planting depth.
2. Take part of the removed soil, mix it well with rotted compost or manure and then fill the hole with the mixture until you reach the required planting depth.
3. Before placing the bulb in the hole, add a teaspoon of GARDENWORKS bone meal for small bulbs or a tablespoon for large ones, then drop the bulb in.
4. After covering the bulb, water well. This will encourage the growth process right away.

PLANTING BULBS UNDER TREES

Though many plants do not grow well under the shade of a tree, it is possible to grow early-flowering bulbs under deciduous trees while the branches are still bare. Good choices include bluebells, daffodils and crocuses. Avoid bulbs such as tulips, anemones, lilies and bearded iris; shade cast from the leaves during the summer, prevents growth in these late flowering bulbs.

Bulb Tip Trees compete strongly for soil moisture and nutrients, so be sure to feed and water your bulbs during their growth period.

PLANTING BULBS IN YOUR LAWN

By planting bulbs under your lawn, you can extend flowers from their conventional beds into new territory. When choosing bulbs for planting in the lawn, be certain to pick early-blooming varieties, so that the bulb's leaves will die down before you need to mow your lawn. There are two methods of planting bulbs in the lawn, depending upon the size of the bulb, how many you want to plant and how closely.

Small Bulbs (crocuses, snow drops and scilla) and single large bulbs can be planted in the conventional manner. Dig a hole in your lawn and drop in a little bone meal. Insert your bulb and cover it. The small patch of grass that is uprooted can be re-inserted as a "plug." Water in well and get ready for spring.

Clumps of large bulbs (daffodils) look wonderful in large lawns, especially when they merge into a woodland or slope. Since large bulbs need to be planted fairly deep and, depending on the variety, prefer a well-cultivated spot, the sod will have to be lifted.

1. Cut a rectangle in the grass with a sharp spade or lawn edging tool.
2. Slide the spade under the grass and roll the turf back.
3. Dig the soil to a depth of about 12".
4. Fill the hole with a mixture of the removed soil and a well-rotted compost or manure.
5. Randomly place the bulbs. Cover with the remaining soil mixture, restoring it to the original level, and water in.
6. Roll the grass back, and water again.

Do you want to enjoy a colourful lawn again next year? Delay your first mowing by a couple of weeks to ensure that the leaves of the bulbs have died down. Do not apply moss or weed killers to this section of the lawn until the bulbs are absolutely dormant.

Portions of this information sheet were extracted from "A Landscape of Bulbs", by Heide Kim, originally published in GARDENNOTES, Issue #34, September 1996