

Plant Bulbs Now

UNIVERSITY PARK, (Centre Co.)—If you would like to have flowers in your yard as early as next January, spend an autumn afternoon planting bulbs.

Spring-flowering bulbs are available from garden centers and catalogs during September and October. "They're easy to plant and live for years," says Dr. J. Robert Nuss, professor of ornamental horticulture in Penn State's College of Agricultural Sciences. "Best of all, they start brightening the landscape while it's still late winter."

For a steady procession of blooms from late January to late July, Nuss offers several planting suggestions:

Galanthus, or snow drops, bloom the earliest. "If you've wondered what those little white, bell-shaped flowers are blooming in people's yards starting in late January, they're probably snow-drop," says Nuss.

Species crocuses start blooming in late January or early February, followed by large-flowered Dutch crocuses in February and March. Also blooming at this time are winter aconite, which resemble low-growing buttercups; chionodoxa, which have pink, white or blue star-shaped flowers; and squill, which have deep-blue flowers.

Anemone blanda bloom in March and April and have purple, pink or white flowers that look like asters. Also blooming at this time are grape hyacinths, with grape-like clusters of purple or white flowers, and iris reticulata, which looks like other irises but grow only five inches tall.

"Some more familiar flowers also bloom during these months, such as hyacinths; double early, Kaufmanniana and Fosteriana tulips; and miniature and trumpet daffodils," says Nuss.

Darwin hybrid tulips bloom in April and May, along with Triumph, Gregii, single-late, double-late, lily-flowered, Rembrandt and parrot tulips. They come in an array of heights, colors and markings. "some interesting smaller bulbs, such as checkered lilies and spanish bluebells, also bloom in late spring," says Nuss.

For flowers in June, plant Dutch irises, which look like slender bearded irises, and allium a colorful and sweeter-scented relative of the onion. Alliums vary greatly in size and color—from four-inch stems with clusters of yellow flowers, to giant allium, which can reach three feet tall and is topped with a sphere of purple flowers five inches in diameter.

"You also can plant German irises in the fall," says Nuss. "These are the familiar irises with the fruity scent and large, bearded flower. They grow from rhizomes planted about three inches deep, and they extend the blooming season to the end of July."

Flowering bulbs can be planted in formal or informal beds, rock gardens and in established ground covers. Most prefer partial shade, so avoid planting them where they will receive direct midday sun. Heated basement walls can damage bulbs, so plant them at least five feet away from foundations.

"Keep in mind that you can fit

a lot of bulbs in one space by planting large bulbs, covering them with two inches of soil and planting small bulbs on top of them," says Nuss. "You also can plant shallow-rooted annuals on top of bulbs." Bulbs need good drainage and a high amount of organic matter, so if your soil is mostly sand or clay, mix in peat moss or compost until organic matter is about 25 percent of volume.

When planting tulips, daffodils and other large bulbs, dig out the entire bed to a depth of about 8 inches. Arrange the bulbs six inches apart with the pointed ends up. Smaller bulbs such as crocuses and grape hyacinths can be planted three inches apart and five inches deep.

Before covering the bulbs, add one rounded tablespoon per square foot of either a sulfur-coated, slow-release fertilizer, or one handful per square foot of bone meal plus one tablespoon per square foot of 8-8-8 or 10-10-10 fertilizer.

You then can replace half the soil and water the area thoroughly, add the remaining soil, and water again. "A three-inch layer of wood chips, peat moss or bark will retain moisture and keep mud from splashing on the flowers next spring," says Nuss.

Squirrels and chipmunks dig up bulbs, especially crocuses. "If you anticipate problem, spread fine-mesh chicken wire over the soil and then apply mulch," says Nuss.

When shoots start breaking through the soil in the spring, sprinkle a second application of



Ida's Notebook

Ida Risser

IDA'S NOTEBOOK

There are some jobs that can be done almost without thinking. One such job was picking grapes off the bunches to make juice. This year I got many more than in previous years. It is times like this when one remembers things that happened long ago.

My mind wandered over events that happened in the 1940s during the war. You see, my sister and I took a bus to New York City for four days. Even now, I am amazed that our parents allowed us to go as they were very strict.

However, we had a wonderful time as we purchased a "Visitor's

fertilizer around them. As flowers fade, cut them off so they don't go to seed and rob nourishment from the bulbs.

"The foliage gathers nutrients of the next season's growth, so allow it to completely die before removing it," says Nuss. "Other than these few steps, spring-flowering bulbs don't need much attention. They'll come back year after year, just when winter seems as though it never will end."

Guide" for 35¢ and traveled all over New York City on buses and subways. Our room in Times Square Hotel cost us three dollars and the subway was a nickel. We ate meals at Child's restaurants for fifty cents.

One day we went to Coney Island and spent hours on the beach. Here we saw the parachute drop which was an amusement that I had been on at the World's Fair in 1939. We visited museums, large cathedrals, and enjoyed plays on Broadway at night. The Bronx Zoo was interesting as was the experience of eating for the first time in a Chinese restaurant. They gave us so much food but only charged us for the amount that we ate.

When we got separated on a subway, it was almost a disaster. But, we managed to meet again at the same station—the doors shut automatically with one of us on each side. New York City was a big town full of soldiers and sailors during the war. It was a new experience for two country girls but luckily everything turned out all right.

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