

## Fall Care Benefits Spring Bulbs

COLLEGEVILLE (Montgomery Co.) — A little attention to detail in the fall when you are purchasing spring flowering bulbs can benefit the garden next spring. When selecting bulbs for the garden, remember that they are living items with many of the same properties as other bulbs such as onions. The same criteria you apply to selecting onions for kitchen use should apply to your flowering bulbs.

In the food store you wouldn't purchase items that are soft and mushy if quality is measured as product firmness. The same is true for bulbs; they should be solid and firm when purchased. Check the surface quality of the bulbs too. Rough handling in the store or during transit will show up as bruised spots on the surface of the bulb. Rough handling will also result in missing coverings on the bulbs or even mold which results when fungi breaks into the outer skin of the bulb. Missing skins will also cause the bulbs to shrivel from loss of moisture. Shriveled bulbs are generally poorer quality and may not produce good flowers in the spring. Never purchase bulbs that have sprouted. Sprouting means they have been exposed to moisture. Bulbs that sprout before they are planted, start off weakened because they are using stored energy from inside the bulbs.

If you are buying bulbs from a nursery or garden-center, look for those which carry bulbs loose in bins. This will allow you to hand-pick good quality bulbs. When buying bulbs, big is better because the larger the bulb, the more food the bulb has in reserve for next spring. Larger bulbs are more like-

ly to produce stronger stems and more blooms. Initial bulb size also influences how long bulbs last.

Unless you shop around, you can't know what large is when comparing one bulb to another. Variations among species will make the selection more difficult. Become familiar with the different sizes and shapes of the bulbs you plan to purchase. Flip through a few catalogs that mention grades and sizes, make notes if they give actual dimensions, and use this to select the largest bulbs for that species.

Avoid buying bulbs at a grocery or discount store that sells bulbs packed in mesh bags. It is difficult to see what you are getting and there are often a few small bulbs in with a few larger ones, not unlike that one large potato in front of the mesh window in the potato bag. It is also not a good idea to purchase bulbs from anyone offering a large assortment of bulbs for a single low price; these ads commonly appear in the Sunday paper. When this occurs you may be getting quantity, but no quality. Companies that make such offers generally buy lower quality bulbs that are culled from production.

Once you obtain your quality bulbs, handle them much the same as onions. Keep them in a cool (40 degree to 50 degree F), dark, and well-ventilated area. If you are working with small numbers and the weather remains warm, place the bulbs in a paper bag, and place them in the refrigerator crisper until they are planted. Proper planting and the subsequent care of the bulbs in the landscape will assure you of many colorful seasons from your investment. Most gardeners

know that bulbs are planted with the pointed end up and at the depth shown in the directions that accompany each species.

Bulb fertilization at planting time, however, is viewed differently by different sources. There is some reserve "food" in the bulb at planting time, but it is much better to incorporate additional plant nutrients into the soil when the bulbs are set. By incorporating a time-release fertilizer into the soil, nutrients will be available for the roots next spring.

Bonemeal was long-considered a standard bulb fertilizer. However, newer processing techniques result in lower nitrogen levels in the bonemeal, even though the phosphorus remains high. Bulbs need a complete fertilizer for optimum growth and development. The nitrogen is essential for both growth and blooms, phosphorus for root growth and bulb longevity, and potassium for healthy growth and disease resistance.

Work a complete fertilizer such as 5-10-5 into the soil at the bottom of the planting hole. In new beds it is advisable to work up the entire area and incorporate the fertilizer at rates of up to two to three pounds per each 100 square feet of planted area. The newer coated fertilizers would be very good because of their time-release action allows the nutrients to become available over a longer period of time.

Warm soil temperatures are necessary in the fall to develop a strong root systems on the bulbs. For this reason get the bulbs into the soil well before the soil freezes. Don't worry if grape hyacinth or daffodils produce some foliage in the fall; it won't interfere with

flowering.

Research indicates that sunlight on the bulb reduces the number of blooms. Keep the bulbs in their package until the time they are placed in the soil, or plant on a cloudy day.

Once the bulbs have been set, it may be advisable to cover the beds with chicken wire or hardware cloth to protect them from digging squirrels, chipmunks or dogs. When small areas are planted,

some gardeners set the bulbs in a wire basket to protect them. A three to four inch layer of mulch over the planted area will help retain some warmth in the soil while the roots develop, but will not keep the soil from eventually freezing later in the winter. Reduce the thickness of the mulch to two inches next spring as the foliage emerges and enjoy the colorful display.

## Fall Harvest Days

WESTMINSTER, Md.—On Saturday, October 7 and Sunday, October 8, Fall Harvest Days will be celebrated at the Carroll County Farm Museum in Westminster, Maryland from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. each day. Admission is \$4 for adults; ages 7 to 18, 60 and over are \$2; ages 6 and under are free.

The historic Farmhouse will be open for tours. Visitors will be received from 10 a.m. until 5 p.m. There will be no extra charge to

tour the Farmhouse. The Living History Center will be filled with artisans demonstrating old-timey skills. Other crafts people include a blacksmith, a broommaker, a quilter, and spinner. Visit the Veterinary Surgeon's Office and talk with the Vet on duty for the day. Farm animals are located in the pasture area.

For more information, call (410) 848-7775; (410) 876-2667; or 1-800-654-4645.

## Walk-In Fun

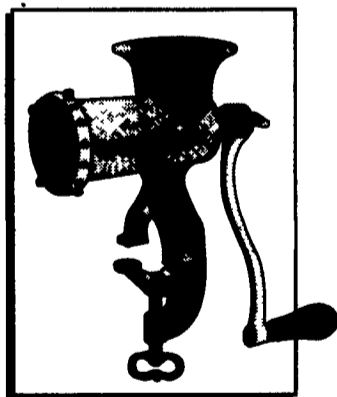
HERSHEY (Dauphin Co.) — On the second Saturday of each month, September through May, the Hershey Museum will offer participatory activities for walk-in visitors. The activities, which will be offered continuously from 1 to 4 p.m., include simple crafts and

interactive experiences such as an archaeological dig, a taste test, and a factory assembly line. The activities are appropriate for families and small groups of Scouts. For more information contact Lois Hartmann at (717) 534-3439.

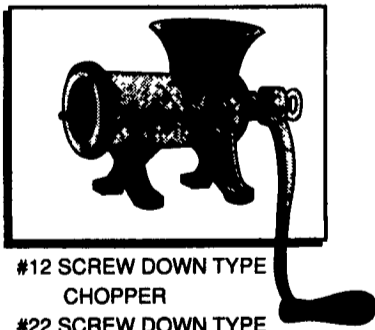
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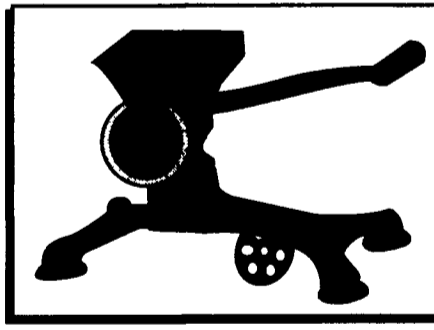
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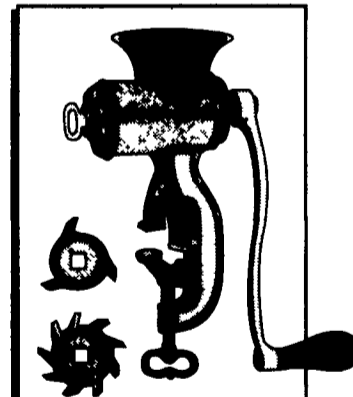
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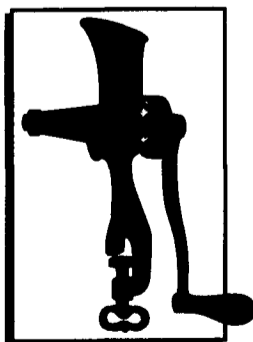
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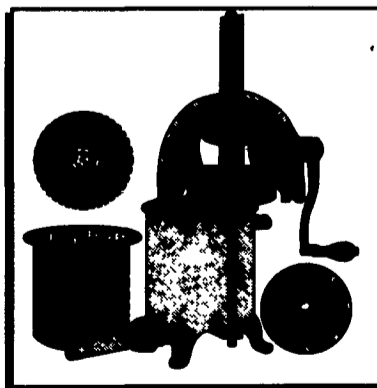
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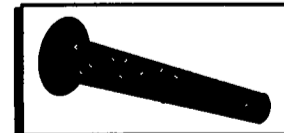
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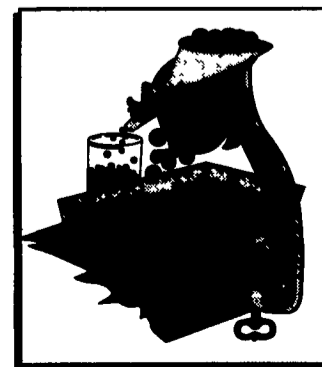
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