

# Bulbs: Fall Planting Tips

## What kind of bulbs can I plant?

- **Snowdrops** are the earliest blooming bulbs.
- **Crocus** provide a range of colour for early spring blooms.
- **Daffodils** (Narcissus) are easy to grow and look great by themselves or in combination. They are deer and squirrel resistant.
- **Hyacinths** are fragrant and are most effective in mass plantings.
- **Muscari** (Grape Hyacinths) have small blue flowers and combine well with yellow Daffodils or red Tulips.
- **Tulips** come in many colors and forms as well as a variety of heights and bloom times.



## Bulbs in Containers

Planting bulbs in containers allows you to create your own miniature garden and surround yourself with colour and fragrance. This is ideal for people who have a small garden or a patio garden to add an extra splash of colour. Select bulbs of varying bloom times, colour and height to create a longer lasting, interesting planter. Any pot with good drainage can be used however smaller pots, less than 12" in diameter, need protection from frost.

## How do I plant bulbs?



**In pots:** Start by covering the drainage hole(s) with fabric or broken pots to keep the soil from plugging up holes after watering. Next fill partially with potting soil, mixing in some Bulb Food to add nutrients. Then plant the bulbs at their required depth and fill the rest of the pot with soil. Water the pot after planting and keep the soil moist but not wet during the winter. You can plant winter pansies, mums, and/or ornamental cabbage/kale with the bulbs to provide color during the winter.



**In the garden:** Bulbs are generally planted the same depth as their diameter. If the bulb is 2 inches across it should be planted with 2 inches of soil above it. They can be planted in layers with larger and later blooming bulbs planted below smaller, early blooming varieties. Dig holes a little larger than needed to place the bulbs to ensure they will have loose soil to spread their roots. Mix in some bulb food to help the bulbs establish and produce abundant blooms. Cover over with soil and water in. Keep the bed moist but not overly wet through the winter.

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## Naturalizing Bulbs

Naturalizing bulbs means planting bulbs that will come back year after year on their own with little help. The best bulbs for naturalizing are rock garden narcissi, some daffodils, crocus, snowdrops, grape hyacinths and botanical tulips. Planting these bulbs in the ground will most often result in them spreading on their own to create a mass of spring colour for years to come. Be sure to plant in a spot they will have adequate light and mix some bone meal into the soil when planting.

## Fertilizing: Bone Meal Vs. Bulb Food

### What is bone meal?

Bone meal is a mixture of coarse and finely ground animal bones. Bone meal is primarily used as a fertilizer, particularly in organic gardening, as it is an excellent source of phosphorus, calcium.

Bone meal is mostly used to provide phosphorus and calcium to plants and soil. Phosphorus helps plants grow and photosynthesize effectively. Calcium is vital to the formation of healthy cells and helps plants move and retain other elements within themselves. Phosphorus occurs naturally in the soil, but plants often require more of it than the soil can provide without a supplement.

### What is bulb food?

Bulb food is a specialized fertilizer that provides bulbs with the best blend of nutrients to ensure they grow healthy and strong. It also promotes lovely blossoms in the spring as well as bulbs capable of storing food and energy over winter.

### Bone meal first, then bulb food

Bone meal is good at the time of planting bulbs, then applying a balanced bulb food once the foliage appears above the soil line in late winter/early spring.

There are a couple of reasons for this. Nitrogen can burn the actual bulb, which only need the phosphorus and potash from bone meal to stimulate rooting. But once the bulb is sending out a stem, it needs nitrogen to become strong, so it won't bend over from the weight of the flowers that it sets. This is especially important for bulbs with large heavy flowers, such as tulips, ranunculus, and hyacinth.

It's also important to dig your holes or trenches a little deeper than the bulb needs to be, applying some bone meal, then a little more soil so the bulb does not sit directly on the food. This encourages those roots a reason to stretch out to the food.

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## **Bulb Food (3-15-8)**

### **Benefits**

- Has an organic base
- Provides nutrients to the plants over a two to three-month period
- Slow release nitrogen (3%) that is partially organic
- High phosphorus (15%) in a readily available form to promote strong vigorous growth in the spring
- A moderate balance of potash (8%) to produce strong flower colors, sturdy healthy plant stems, and promote disease resistant plants

### **Application Time**

- Should be applied when you plant your bulbs in the fall by mixing into the soil before planting
- Apply again in the spring as the bulbs emerge from the soil
- Another application should be made after the bulbs have finished flowering to store energy for the next spring



## **Bone Meal (2-14-0)**

### **Benefits**

- Totally organic in a granulated form
- Breaks down slowly over a period of between six months and a year
- It is necessary to add a more balanced fertilizer after six months
- Low nitrogen (2%) and no potash (0%) so it is necessary to add a more balanced fertilizer after the bone meal has broken down
- High phosphorus (14%) in a slow release form to promote growth of roots
- Not ideal for annuals or bulbs if you plan to lift them in the spring after blooming

### **Application Time**

- It is best used when planting shrubs and trees that will be there for a long time or bulbs that you intend to naturalize (leave permanently)

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