

# PERMANENT PERENNIAL BULB essentials

An early epiphany leading to a career in horticulture and landscape design occurred in my 20s. I had just purchased my first home and was eagerly pouring over a bulb catalogue, planning my first spring garden. I was so excited about the rich riot of colour and diversity that I literally could not sleep that night!

STORY AND PHOTOS  
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Oh, how tastes change with time and experience. I am no longer seduced by big, bright blooms that perish after only a season or a few short years. I have evolved into a thrifty gardener, of both time and money. Call me anti-annuals. I even use perennial plants in pot displays. You, too, can follow suit and choose bulb workhorses that are truly recurrent and/or that multiply over time and you won't feel deprived of a gorgeous colour range or variety – I promise.

## BULB BASICS

Spring bulbs can add an extra two months of beautiful blossoms to your garden, and because our Canadian garden season is short, it makes them especially important. This spring or summer, plan where you would most like to see those blooms appear next year and you'll be ready for bulb planting this fall.

Place spring bulbs amongst perennial plants so that their emerging leaves will mask the bulbs' unsightly, but necessary, dieback foliage. Bulb foliage must be left intact so that their energy can be reabsorbed back into the bulb for next year's bloom.

I am using the generic reference of "bulbs," but really, these underground storage organs come in several forms. Bulbs, corms and tubers are the three most common. Regardless of which type, always plant bulbs in well-draining soil to avoid root rot. Plant in autumn with the pointy side up; perhaps you can also spot the remains of the old roots on the bottom. If it's still not clear which side is up, plant on its side.



Flowering in later spring, the small orchid-like Dutch iris is yet another classic available in all sorts of sumptuous colours. The true-blue hues are especially handsome.

## Melanie's Perennial Bulb Picks



This old fashioned favourite heralds the end of winter and promises fair weather to follow. The very early blooming, miniature plant often is found flowering amongst the snow with bright, pure white blossoms. New offerings include larger, doubled blooms with interesting markings.



Another small but familiar mainstay, crocus comes in both early and mid-spring blooming varieties. Crocus hues include white, bright and subtle shades of yellow, plus cool-tone purples and blues that are a perfect complement when planted side by side.



Very diverse in size, the striking spherical shape of ornamental onion flower adds excitement and grandeur to the late spring garden. Purple shades are most commonly seen, but they're also available in white, blue, yellow and pink. Though expensive, it's a worthy long-blooming addition.



Most of the large and lovely hybridized tulip blooms you know and love do not reliably return in our Canadian climate. The red, orange, and yellow varieties of the Darwin Hybrid series have a good chance of re-bloom. For the most dependable sort, choose species or botanical tulips and their barley-hybridized strains. If marked as "naturalizing" you're on the right track. Though smaller than their commonplace counterpart, these demure beauties will dependably reappear, every year.



The large daisy-like blossoms of the Grecian windflower are available in a rich and delicious colour range. From cool mauves and blues to happy pinks and fuchsias, these hardy bulbs boast an extended bloom period of four-to-six weeks, beginning in mid-spring.



Daffodil blossoms are gorgeous, enormous and some (dare I say) are even exotic looking. New varieties are offered in a number of warm colour combinations, sizes, styles and bloom times. A glamorous and showy addition to the spring garden with a lengthy display, plant them in droves.

## A WORD ABOUT COLOUR

Though some bulbs listed here may be considered common, it is how you use their colours to keep your garden fresh, exciting and current. A common blunder is to add all hues to the garden. Instead, choose a restrained palette. Decide on warm or cool tones or a monochromatic, analogous or complementary theme for a spectacular and sophisticated springtime display. Now is the time to plan your next spring garden wisely. Enjoy! ☺