

Time for Spring Color

The crisp fall mornings of October can leave behind the sparkling crystals of frost as winter eagerly approaches. Many of us delight with the change in weather and look forward to the coming season. From the professional gardener to the first time homeowner this time of year is perfect for planning for beautiful spring color.

To fill your yard with delightful bursts of color in the first days of spring it's time to choose and plant your bulbs. Most spring-flowering varieties need to be planted in the fall season as the soils cool off and daytime temperatures dip. Bulbs are usually planted from October through the beginning of November in our northern Nevada climate.

The best way to prepare for your bulb plantings is to create a plan. Start by establishing the areas in your yard you will plant with bulbs. Use some graph paper and mark the dimensions of the planter areas to be used. Now you can begin to pick the bulb varieties you want to use.

There are some classic bulb choices like the unforgettable tulips, bright yellow and white daffodil as well as brightly colored peonies. All these bulbs come in a variety of colors, shapes, and sizes to fit the needs of your garden's space. For a little extra pizzazz explore some more intriguing bulbs for exotic flower shapes and colors. Allium will provide a fabulous globed shape flower head set elegantly on top of a large spike and ranunculus will bring bold colored flowers, tightly rolled petals and gracefully placed flowers to any space, though they need protection from our harshest winter weather.

To begin choosing varieties research the growth habit of each bulb. You'll want to consider the height, color, bloom time and form of each flower. When your research is done, design established, and bulbs purchased, it's time to prepare the soil.

The soils of the typical yard in this area need some amending to prepare for planting. This holds true for bulbs as they need to be planted in an area with good drainage to avoid rotting in cold, wet soil. Kellogs Amend is a good product to mix into the native earth. It will help loosen the clay and compacted soils and improve the drainage, providing a good environment for bulbs to winter in the yard. The addition of bone meal or all-purpose bulb food ensures the largest and healthiest blooms.

With your design in hand it's time to dig the holes and place your bulbs. Be sure to read the directions provided for each bulb type you are planting; depths will vary depending on the size of the bulbs. For large areas it may be easier to excavate larger holes that taper to suggest naturally occurring sweeps, or drifts of color. For small areas individual holes can be dug and bulbs placed. When doing individual bulb plantings it is best to cluster them in 3's or 5's for a natural looking burst of color in the garden design. Individual holes can be dug with a small garden trowel or try a spade designed for easy bulb planting in the yard.

Protect your spring flowering investment by using mulch to cover your bulbs. After the ground freezes apply 2-3" of mulch material over your planted area. This will protect the bulbs against freeze thaw periods throughout the year. As the season progress you must not forget about the bulbs planted in the fall. A dry winter season can be detrimental to the growth of the bulbs in the spring season. If nature doesn't supply the water needed through the winter you will need to moisten your bulbs by hand with a garden hose. These treatments will ensure a bountiful bloom when the warm season returns.

It's time to relax now with your new bulbs planted in the ground. Some hard work and planning in the comfortable fall months will bring great reward as another year ends and we await the approach of another spring season. Soon the landscape will flourish again and your yard will gleam with color as the first sunrays of spring reach down and warm the ground, encouraging the fall planted bulbs to make their appearance.