



# The Real Dirt

September, 2011

## Planting ahead!

As your mind turns to putting your garden to bed for the winter, and the bright colours of summer flowers are mere memories, consider planting some bulbs this fall for an early fix of spring blooms next year. With careful planning, you can enjoy 90 days of spring colour. Start with nodding snowdrops (white), dainty winter aconite (waxy yellow), and sunny crocus flowers (delicate mauves, purples, whites and yellows). Finish with late-blooming tulips (all colours) and ornamental onions known as Allium (strong purples and cool whites).



**Tulipa "Ballade"** photo by Kelly Noel

In general, get your daffodils and hyacinths into the ground by the end of September or at the latest by Thanksgiving. Tulips are more forgiving because they form their roots in the spring: if you can still dig the soil, you can successfully plant tulip bulbs in late fall.

### The Real Dirt!

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By choosing different types of species and cultivar tulips, you can extend the blooming season.

Species tulips bloom early, are relatively short (10-25 cm), are drought-tolerant, and are great naturalizers, meaning they multiply year after year. Why not try Tarda (clear yellow with a white fringe), Lady Jane (soft red with a white edge), or Little Princess (glowing orange)? Cultivar tulips include single early and double early varieties - built by mother nature to withstand spring winds and April showers, velvety Emperor and Foster tulips, huge Darwin hybrids, and finally the fragrant, double, peony-flowering tulips, such as Angelique (silvery pink) and Mount Tacoma (shimmery white).

Squirrels love tulips; to help deter them from digging up your bulbs, you can plant most tulips (not species ones) deeper than the recommended depth, without hurting their performance the following year. You can place chicken wire or boards over the bulb plantings but if you use a board, remember to remove it as soon as the ground freezes, so the tulips don't have a tussle growing in the spring! You can also plant crown imperial fritillaries (*Fritillaria imperialis*) near your tulips; squirrels don't like their smell.

Most bulbs favour well drained soil and a sunny location. You can plant sun-loving bulbs under a deciduous tree if it's late to leaf out. Why not enjoy a combination of bright, fragrant daffodils like Carlton (two-toned yellow) and Thalia (pure white) coming through a bed of periwinkle under a tree, or a stunning bed of yellow Dutchmasters or even pink-tinged daffodils, interplanted through bugleweed or Japanese spurge?

Woodland bulbs such as wood hyacinths (*Scilla*) do well in a permanently shady locale - under the edge of an evergreen, for example.



**Narcissus "Tahiti"** photo by Kelly Noel

Don't skimp when selecting bulbs for your garden; choose large, firm ones. The bigger the circumference, the more mature the bulb is, which means the sooner it will bloom for you. Buy individual bulbs, rather than a package, so that you can examine each bulb for size and strength. Don't worry if some of the papery skin (tunic) has fallen off, as long as there are no noticeable pocks or blemishes on the bulb itself. Bulbs look best when planted in clusters of 5-9.

Most bulbs come with instructions for planting. When in doubt, dig a hole approximately 3-4 times the height of the bulb; for example, plant a 5-cm daffodil bulb 15 to 20 cm deep, pointy end up. If you just can't sort out which end of the bulb is up, plant it on its side. Tamp the soil around the bulbs to eliminate any air pockets, then water the bulbs. You don't need to fertilize them - they have their own food supply - just sit back and look forward to next spring and the rewards of your labour.

Mary Shearman Reid  
Master Gardener

## September TO DO List

- Divide perennials
- Rejuvenate garden beds by moving plants around for continuous bloom and better design & function
- Mulch flower beds with compost or shredded leaves – let the worms do the hard work of incorporating this organic matter into the soil
- Start tagging/labelling dahlias and other summer bulbs indicating colour, size of bloom and height (and cultivar name if known) so that when you lift them for storage, you will be able to include that information. Once frost hits, it's hard to identify each plant and memory is not always reliable
- Water trees & shrubs (especially those planted this year) so that they go into dormancy well watered
- Start cleaning, pruning, repotting and isolating houseplants that have been outside for the summer to ensure a bug-free re-entry. Spray the plants thoroughly with an insecticidal soap and repeat two more times, waiting 5 days between applications, before bringing them indoors

## Tip of the Month:

A few more Spring bulb tips:

- ☼ sprinkle bloodmeal around the bulbs to feed them and deter squirrels
- ☼ human hair or dog hair spread around the freshly planted area will also deter squirrels
- ☼ mark where the bulbs have been planted so that you don't accidentally dig them up again
- ☼ plant bulbs at the back of the border or behind late emerging perennials so that the dying foliage is not an eyesore after the blooms have finished
- ☼ existing clumps of daffodils or tulips may need dividing if they have become crowded and are no longer producing blooms. This can be done now, if you know their exact location. Using a garden

## Master Gardeners of Simcoe County



### Where to find us this month for free gardening advice!

#### ONGOING:

**E-mail Help Line:** [mgoc\\_helpline@yahoo.ca](mailto:mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca)

- monitored daily
- send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID

#### COMING EVENTS

**September 20<sup>th</sup>, 2011 Master Gardener Meeting 7:00pm**

The White Pine Boardroom,  
2284 Nursery Rd. Midhurst

**TBA** Fix up session for The Bob Rumball Centre.

#### UPCOMING ISSUES

House Plants

**Ask a Master Gardener** books containing answers to your most common gardening questions are available at any of these speaking engagements for only \$10 or Gardening Guides for only \$1. Valuable references for you or as gifts for a gardening friend! Either e-mail [jonbon@bell.net](mailto:jonbon@bell.net) to order or call 705-436-5292



For information on arranging a lecture for your group please contact Joan Nieman-Agapas 705-721-9088. For more information on Master Gardeners, visit our website: and follow the links to

spade or fork, carefully dig out the bulbs, prepare a new area and replant them. This is a good time to add some compost or bonemeal to feed them

- ☼ large drifts of daffodils or grape hyacinths can be quite dramatic. One technique to get this “naturalized” look is to take a pail of 100 bulbs and “throw” the contents out on the lawn or garden bed (as if you were throwing out a pail of water). Then plant the bulbs where they land. Don't worry about even spacing, you're trying to recreate what happens in nature
- ☼ naturalized plantings of bulbs look great, but the lawn cannot be cut until the bulb foliage dies back completely which may not work in all types of landscape



A naturalized area of daffodils

*Gardening is a matter of your enthusiasm holding up until your back gets used to it.*

*~Author Unknown*