

Extension Notes

Personal Column for October 7, 2009

By Gary Hall, ISU Regional Extension Education Director

Spring Is Coming!

Yes, spring is coming with all the glory of those beautiful flowers you admired last spring. To obtain some of that beauty for your landscape consider planting tulips, daffodils, crocuses, and other spring-flowering bulbs this fall.

Be sure to select large, firm bulbs. If you can't get them in the ground right away, store the bulbs in a cool, dry, well-ventilated location, such as a garage.

October is the ideal time to plant spring-flowering bulbs in Iowa. When planted in October, spring-flowering bulbs have sufficient time to develop a good root system before the ground freezes in winter. If weather permits, bulbs can be planted as late as mid to late November. However, late-planted bulbs will emerge and bloom later than normal the following spring.

Tulips, daffodils and most other spring-flowering bulbs perform best in areas that receive six or more hours of direct sun each day. All high quality bulbs should bloom well the first spring.

Bulbs also need fertile, well-drained soils. Bulbs may rot in wet, poorly drained sites. Planting bulbs in raised beds may be the best option in poorly drained sites.

Consider planting spring-flowering bulbs in clusters or groups to achieve the greatest visual impact in the garden. Plant 10 or more bulbs of the same variety of daffodils and tulips in an area. Smaller growing plants, such as grape hyacinths and crocuses, should be planted in clusters of 25 or more bulbs.

Plant bulbs at a depth equal to three to four times their maximum bulb diameter. Accordingly, tulips and daffodils should be planted six to eight inches deep, crocuses and grape hyacinths only three to four inches deep. Large bulbs, such as tulips and daffodils, should be spaced four to six inches apart. A three-inch spacing is adequate for crocuses, grape hyacinths and other small bulbs.

After planting, water the bulbs periodically (if the weather in fall is dry) to promote good root development.

If you already have an established bed of spring flowering bulbs in your landscape, consider fertilizing those beds in October. If established bulb beds have been fertilized in the past, there is often plenty of phosphorus and potassium present in the soil. However, it is best to take a soil test to be sure. If the soil needs phosphorus and potassium, use a complete fertilizer (such as 10-10-10, 9-9-6, etc.) at the rate of 2.5 pounds per 100 square feet. This would equal 1 rounded teaspoon per square foot. If phosphorus and potassium are not needed, blood meal makes an excellent fertilizer. It should be applied at the rate of 2 pounds per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon

per square foot. Turf fertilizers such as a 27-3-3 or 30-3-3 can also be used but the rate would have to be cut to 1 pound per 100 square feet or 1 teaspoon per 2 square feet.

Enjoy planting new bulbs and encouraging the old beds. It will be time well spent as you enjoy the beauty of those spring flowering bulbs next April or May.

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Contact: Gary Hall, 2023 S Federal Ave, Mason City, IA 50401, 641-423-0844,
garyhall@iastate.edu