

News Column for use Week of 9/21/2020
Kelsey Hatesohl, Extension Agent: Horticulture
River Valley Extension District
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Time to Plant Spring-Flowering Bulbs

With fall quickly approaching it is hard to think about next spring, but now is the time to plant those spring-flowering bulbs we all love. Late September through October is the best time to plant spring-flowering bulbs such as crocus, tulips, and daffodils. These plants need to develop roots in the fall and must meet a chilling requirement over the winter to bloom in the spring.

Choosing the right planting location can make a difference in how well your bulbs do in the spring. You need to pick a planting site that has full sun to partial shade. The ideal soil should be a sandy loam mix, but even if you don't have that you can add organic material such as peat moss, compost, or aged bark to improve your current soil. For example, heavy clay can be amended by mixing in one-third to one-half organic material.

The planting depths of bulbs will vary depending on the type and size of the bulb. For example, tulips and hyacinths are set about 6 inches deep, and daffodils are put 6 to 8 inches deep. As a rule of thumb, bulbs are planted two to three times as deep as they are wide. The planting depth is the distance from the bottom of the bulb to the top of the soil. Large bulbs are normally spaced 4 to 6 inches apart, and small bulbs about 1 to 2 inches. You can plant bulbs in clumps or irregular masses to produce a better display, or you can line the edge of your flower beds by planting single bulbs in a row.

After placing the bulbs at the proper depth, you want to slowly replace the soil so you can be sure to have a good bulb to soil contact. First, replace half the soil into the hole and add water. Wait until the water has soaked in and then add the remaining soil and water the area again. This process will settle the soil around the bulbs and will create good aeration as well as good drainage for proper root development. Although there will be no top growth in the fall, the roots are developing, so the soil needs to be kept moist but not wet. Mulch can be added after the soil has frozen to prevent small bulbs from being affected by the alternating freeze and thaw of the soil throughout the winter.

Even though you don't see the immediate effects of planting bulbs, they will provide you with that pop of spring color, and will add different dimensions to your flower beds. If you have any questions feel free to stop by or contact me in the Washington office, 785-325-2121 or khatesohl@ksu.edu.

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