

From:



Let's Grow Tulips!

Edited By Linda Jenkinson
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Why Tulips? Why Not!

As the curtain of winter lifts, tulips are one of the first flowers to take the spring stage. As the last drifts of snow seep into the soil, these bright signs of spring dance in the sunlight. However, you don't have to wait for spring to grow tulips. Whether it lies in a bed, under a shrub, in the crevices of a rock garden or in a container, a tulip bulb is an underground flower factory just waiting to "spring up" from whatever soil it occupies.



Tulip bulbs are easily the most recognizable bulb flower in the world today. When asked to name a flower bulb, most people think first of the tulip.

Spring flower bulb gardens are not only beautiful and easy to grow, but tulips and other bulbs symbolize the first signs of spring and the start of a new growing season.

One of the amazing things about tulip gardens is that they are so versatile. No matter what your gardening style is, tulips lend an elegant touch to your garden whether you prefer to plant your tulips in long rows of strong colors or you prefer an abstract approach to

gardening.

If you enjoy abstract tulip gardens, you can achieve a stunning effect by planting tulip bulbs in clusters. By clustering bulbs of the same color together, you will achieve a unified grouping of color that makes a bold statement. However, tulip clusters are beautiful in mixed colors as well. How you plant your tulip garden comes down to personal preference.



Tulips make an excellent addition to perennial gardens. Because tulips are usually the first flowers to bloom in the spring, they provide much needed color to the garden after a long winter. Used in borders or around large shrubs or trees, tulips look absolutely gorgeous.

Tulip gardens are an excellent choice for children, too. Easy-care flowers, tulips flourish year after year, with only the most basic attention. Children love the strong, bold colors of tulips and delight in cutting bouquets of flowers directly from their very own garden to give to family and friends.

Tulip gardens can be beautiful and elegant or wild and carefree. Tulips look wonderful in both formal garden designs as well as informal styles. No matter what your personal style is, tulips look beautiful in any setting.

Selecting Tulip Cultivars

Today there are over 100 species of growing tulips and many hundreds of hybrids, primarily due to the extensive breeding programs and tulip care that began in late sixteenth century Holland.

Tulips originated in Central Asia where they grew in the wild. The word tulip means turban and comes from a Turkish word, turbend. Tulips were cultivated in Turkey as early as 1,000 AD.

In August of 1593, Carolus Clusius received a gift of tulip bulbs from his friend, Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq, the ambassador of Constantinople. He planted the bulbs and the spring of 1594 gave birth to the first tulips of Holland. Clusius's planting is still considered the birth of the Netherlands flower bulb business.

The colorful flowers soon became major trading commodities. Different color strains and mutations were status symbols and in such high demand in the 1600's that tulips were often sold by estimated weight, even before they were lifted from the ground. Trading in tulip futures was dubbed as "tulpenwindhandel" (tulip wind trade). Soon this speculative trading got out of hand and the Dutch government introduced trade restrictions to quash it.

The most popular tulip color has always been, and remains to be red. However, yellow closely follows red as the second most popular color.



Of course, you can find tulips in a variety of color as there are over 3500 tulip cultivars. You can purchase traditional tulip bulbs as well as fancy bulbs, which have a feathered, frilly petal. You can find tulips in solid colors as well as striped petals, or variegated colors.

Tulips come in tall varieties as well as shorter varieties and bloom in single or double blooms. You can purchase tulip bulbs that are early bloomers, maturing early in the springtime, or you can find tulips that will bloom later. So you can plan your bulb flowers to consistently bloom all spring, until other perennials begin blooming and planted annuals fill out your garden, an important consideration in flower garden design.

With so much variety and selection, there is no doubt as to why tulip bulbs are such popular flowers.

Coupled with the excellent selection and the ease of care and planting for tulips, they make an excellent addition to any garden.

When selecting bulbs, a simple rule of thumb is that the bigger the bulb, the bigger the flower. Choose plump bulbs that are firm and heavy for their size. Although the tunic (outer papery skin) need not be intact, avoid withered bulbs and those that are withered, overly dry, scarred, have traces of mold, soft spots, or other blemishes. However, more difficult than selecting bulbs is first choosing from the over 100 varieties of tulips which are divided into 15 divisions. Careful selection from different divisions can help you plan a tulip garden that begins in early spring and dances on through the end of May!



Tulip Divisions

1. Single Early

Short-stemmed tulips (usually about 8-inches high) that flower in late March and early April.

2. Double Early

A profusion of petals on 12 to 15 inch stems makes an attractive display when these bulbs are forced indoors. Although they usually bloom from early to mid-April, they are more delicate than some other cultivars and need protection from cold and inclement weather.

3. Triumph

A standard since 1923 when they were named by Dutch breeder, N. Zandbergen, these tulips take the throne at the end of April as they tower to 18 inches high.

4. Darwin Hybrids

One of the tallest garden tulips (usually over 2-feet tall) these red and yellow beauties are perfect for naturalizing and are those you generally see returning in established gardens May after May.

5. Single Late

Originally known as Cottage tulips, these hybrids inter-mingled and successfully merged with Darwin hybrids. Like the Darwins, they grow well over 2-feet tall and bloom in May.

6. Lily-Flowered

Another May-flowering tulip, this group was originally grouped with Cottage tulips but was reclassified in 1958. On stems that grow from 1 ½ to 2-feet tall, long, shapely flowers have pointed petals that most closely resemble native Turkish tulips and boast the first scented tulip, the Ballerina, in their troupe.

7. Fringed

A short (12 to 18 inches) but showy group of tulips that brightens the May garden with ruffles that either mirror or add a contrasting color to the rest of the bloom.

8. Viridiflora

May blooms with a flash of green streaked through their petals, this group of tulips varies from one to two-feet tall.

9. Rembrandt

Once highly prized by gardeners, today these tulips are nearly obsolete. Although streaked with beautiful breaks and stripes of artistic color, it was discovered that this palette was created by a virus that could spread to other tulip cultivars. Although some suppliers still offer the Rembrandt, these tulips are no longer commercially grown and advertised types are generally no relation to the true Rembrandt cultivars.

10. Parrot

A riot of petals that curl in all directions, these blooms look like they could use some preening. However, they aren't named for their resemblance to feathers, but rather for the bud that resembles a parrot's beak. A few of these May-blooming cultivars are scented. They generally grow from 16 to 24 inches tall.

11. Double Late (Peony Flowered)

Although less resistant to poor weather, peony flowered cultivars are another excellent choice for container tulip growing. From mid to late May, these tall (1 ½ to 2-feet) blooms bear a profusion of petals in close resemblance to their namesake.

12. Kaufmanniana

If you have difficulty in pronouncing the name of this group, you can also call its cultivars 'water lily tulips'. Opening flat under the mid-March sun, the foliage of these flowers is characterized by deep purple or brown blotches. Shorter than some other cultivars, the Kaufmanniana is only 6 to 12 inches high.

13. Fosteriana

Greigii crossed with Kaufmanniana "fostered" this division. From 8 to 18 inches tall, these tulips add drama to the April garden with foliage that ranges from grey-green to glossy green.

14. Greigii

Another short (8 to 12 inches) addition to the early spring garden (late March to early April), striking wavy edged foliage provides a perfect backdrop for an eruption of upright blooms that stand amidst a frame of flared-out petals.

15. Species

The last and the least? This group is truly the dwarf (4 to 12 inches) of the tulip family. However, they're easy to naturalize and their cheery blooms repeat year after year anytime from March to May, some varieties even seeding themselves freely! They are definite proof that good things come in small packages!

Purchasing & Planting Tulips

A Tulip Catalogue Is the Best Place to Order Tulip Bulbs.

If you're looking for a great place to get tulip bulbs, a tulip catalogue might be your best bet. A tulip catalogue helps you to find the tulips that you really want – and those that will look and grow best in your area.



While your local nurseries or gardening stores might only carry a few different tulip varieties, with a tulip catalogue, you should be able to find almost any color of tulip that you can imagine. From black to white, and almost everything in between, there are regular solid color tulips, and "bizarre" tulips that have a mix of several different colors.

A tulip catalogue is also helpful for more than just finding the right tulip bulbs for you. Some tulip catalogues also offer tips and advice on how to cultivate the tulips that you order. Also, since there's generally a small write-up about all of the different tulip varieties, you should be able to find out the specific requirements of each cultivar you find.



A tulip catalogue is also useful if you want to get a better idea of what your tulips will look like in bloom. While most gardening stores offer small pictures of single cultivars they sell, a tulip catalogue often provides full color pictures of both single cultivars and tulip garden ideas.

Planting Tulip Bulbs

Tulips have acclimated to the conditions of their native country. They need the warmth of summer sun to ripen next year's flower buds and the cold of winter to rest for their lively emergence in spring. Although grown in Holland since the late 16th Century, tulips are native to the mountains of Turkey where the winters are cold, the spring rains are plentiful, and the rest of the year is well... hot!

Planting tulips is so easy that they are pretty much fool proof if you follow a few simple tips. Growing tulips is a favorite with gardeners all over the world because of their beauty and simplicity.

The whole purpose of a tulip bulb is to flower. In fact, in the center of each bulb, tiny leaves cradle a baby bud. The white, onion-like bulb that surrounds the bud stores all the nutrients that the bud needs to sprout and grow. Once planted, the only real help the tulip needs to grow is a generous drink of water and some soil to keep it moist.

When the air begins to get cooler, and the leaves start to fall from the trees, most people immediately think of storing the gardening supplies for the winter and getting ready to bundle up. **But wait!** Before packing away your gardening equipment, don't forget to pick up some tulip bulbs to plant in your garden.

Purchase your tulip bulbs close to the time that you are ready to plant them. Fall is the perfect time for planting tulip bulbs, ideally six weeks before the first frost. Once evening temperatures dip to 50°F, it's time to put them in the ground. In general, unplanted bulbs are difficult to keep over winter.

When you plant tulips be sure to choose a sunny location. However, since there are no leaves on the trees when the flowers bloom in the early spring so *tree shade* is usually not a major issue.

Fall is also the best time to nourish your tulips. Tulips prefer a bed of sandy, slightly alkaline soil with at least four hours of sunlight per day, but not direct sun. The addition of a little peat moss loosens compacted garden soil and provides the drainage tulips need. Before you begin planting bulbs, work nutrient rich compost through your soil. Although bulbs will grow in nearly any type of soil, the richer your soil is, the bigger your bulb lift will be next summer.

Plant bulbs two to three times the height of the bulb. For clustered displays, plant them closely together, but not touching. The root side of a bulb is the more rounded side; the pointed side is the part that will open and sprout foliage and flower. The most important thing to know about planting tulips is to plant them with the pointy side up. If you plant the tulips upside down, they may still bloom. However, this will place unnecessary stress on the bulbs.

Container Grown Tulips

Choose your container size according to the height of your cultivar and the density of your bulb planting. Plant bulbs in a container the same as you would garden-grown tulips, making sure there is at least ½ inch of soil below the planting.

Use fresh soil-based potting mixtures only. Peat based mixtures may burn the roots of your bulbs and soilless mixtures dry too quickly.



Plant tulips for indoor forcing in September and October. Place your planted pots in a cool garden spot (outdoors) and cover them with an inch of clean soil. When top growth is about ½ -inch to 1-inch, transfer them indoors to a darkened area with a maximum temperature of 60F. Let the stems lengthen for about three weeks and return them to a lighted area with a slightly higher temperature.

When putting containers outdoors, protect them from severe frosts, particularly when combined with penetrating winds. Store your tulip pots in a cool area like your garage or wrap them with sacking or straw and cover them with plastic bags until the weather is more tulip-friendly.

It is essential to keep tulip containers sufficiently watered. Unlike garden grown plants, those in containers cannot seek for water deeper within their environment. Dry pots result in stunted and shriveled flower heads.

Tulip Care

The best part of growing tulips is watching them dance in the first breaths of spring. The second best part of growing tulips is tulip care. The reason is because once established, a tulip bed needs very little care at all!

Tulip bulbs are an excellent nutrient storage system that need little care besides water.

When tulips finish flowering, either snip the stem or deadhead the bloom. However, let the leaves die naturally. This is the time the bulb absorbs the nutrients it needs for next year's growth. When the foliage becomes discolored, remove it to prevent "tulip fire", which can poison your soil. This is also a good time to lift any tulip bulbs that you want to remove from your garden.

Lifting bulbs isn't any more complex than digging them out of the ground or dumping them out of the pot. Usually each bloom produces one good-sized bulb and two smaller offshoots that can be discarded. Allow lifted bulbs to dry naturally. Then store them somewhere cool in an airy container (net produce bags and burlap bags work well) to provide good circulation until next planting time.

Cutting Tulips

Tulips are exceptionally easy-care flowers, both in the garden and in a vase.

Once your beautiful tulips are blooming in your garden, you are probably going to feel the need to cut some for an equally beautiful bouquet in your house. It is important to cut the flower with a sharp knife and on an angle. Only cut the length of stem you need for your vase. Leave as much of the stalk and as many leaves on the stalk as possible to permit the bulb to reenergize itself.



Once you bring tulips inside, a few tips will help your tulips stay beautiful. Choose a tight fitting vase so that the flowers don't droop or loll around the vase. Standing upright helps tulips stay fresh longer. Putting a penny in the water may also help your tulips stay erect.

Tulip Problems

When tulips produce foliage but no flowers, the most probable cause is damage caused by slugs or snails. Although liquid slug killers are available from most garden centers, most of them are toxic to the beneficial organisms, insects, and micro-colonies in your garden as well as to your pets and your family. The easiest way to deter slugs from invading your tulips is to create a barrier of lava rock or diatomaceous earth around your tulips. Both have sharp edges that kill invading pests by cutting into their skin and causing them to dry up. Another effective way to control slugs is with beer traps. Partially filled cans buried up to the lip will attract and drown slugs.

All in all, tulips present virtually no problems. Tulips are easy-care, easy to plant, and exceptionally lovely however you choose to grow or display them. Don't hesitate! Let's grow tulips!

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HDK-BeheerBV company is the parent company of Gardening-Guides.com. Started in 2004, Gardening-Guides.com is the brainchild of webmaster Hans Dekker. It's his vision to offer you a panoramic view of gardening.



In addition to being the trailblazer for Gardening-Guides.com, Hans is also a talented Internet businessman and owner of Net Research, Netherlands. Starting with just a few articles on Holland bulbs and tulips, Hans has not only used his Internet expertise to grow a virtual garden that holds dozens of cultivars, but he has also cultivated a team of talented writers that provides you with ever-fresh news and insights into every type of gardening you can imagine.

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Gardening-guides.com
HDK Beheer BV
Kantershof 248
1104GM Amsterdam
Netherlands