

Plant bulbs in the spring to enjoy summer splendor

Planting bulbs in autumn for spring beauty is a tradition for many Canadians but planting bulbs in spring for summer splendor can be every bit as rewarding. You can get a major jump on the season by potting up such summer bulbs as cannas, calla lily, dahlia, gladiola, tuberous begonia and elephant's ear (Caladium) in early spring. Already well on their way, they will bloom sooner than bulbs planted directly into the garden in May. Many more gardening ideas and growth charts can be found at Homebasics.ca.

Summer bulbs, also known as tender bulbs, are generally available as bare bulbs for planting from late winter through late spring and as pre-grown bedding plants in pots in late spring through summer.

Although commonly referred to as bulbs there are a variety of different underground storage structures (corms, rhizomes, tubers) that have different names based on their shapes. Bulbs are generally teardrop shaped with a pointed top and round bottom. Corms are similar but longer. Rhizomes or tubers have enlarged stems that grow underground sending roots down and stems upward.

Tips for Summer Bulbs

- Most can be started indoors four to six weeks prior to the usual last frost date (traditionally considered May 24 weekend in most parts of Canada).

- Select firm bulbs, tubers, rhizomes or roots. Avoid any that are soft or mushy.

- Choose clean containers twice as deep as the height of the bulbs, with a drainage hole.

- Use a commercial potting soil or mix with a drainage material like sand or perlite.

- Place bulbs in the potting mix, following planting directions that come with the particular bulbs.

- Water thoroughly and move to a warm space. When growth begins, move to a sunny window or under artificial lights.

- Keep soil moist, but not wet.

- Set pots outside on warm days to help harden off and promote sturdy growth. Once all threat of frost is past, transplant tender bulb plants to the garden or simply drop them with their pots into decorative outdoor containers.

- Enjoy the plants left in their pots outdoors all summer long and then move them back indoors in fall.

- After leaves of tender bulbs planted in the ground have been killed by frost, you can harvest the bulbs for winter storage. Dig up the entire root system, shake off the soil, remove dead leaves and place bulbs in dry peat moss or wood shavings in an open paper bag or box. Store them in a warm dry place.

—News Canada

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