

Spring tulip tips for gardeners

Spring bulbs used to be planted in masses and replaced by annuals when they were finished, but now most bulbs are included in perennial plantings in a much more natural style.



Let's Get Growing
Marjorie Mason Hogue

Cindy Watson asks what perennials go well with bulbs — either to act as a blooming combination or a ripening foliage cover-up.

This is not an exact science, but something which one keeps working at — take pictures of your garden each week during the spring and make notes regarding bloom times in your garden.

When choosing bulbs, know that early spring means April, mid spring refers to early May and late spring is the latter half of May into June.

A combination that works well in my garden is the Greigia tulip Pinocchio which blooms in May through a just sprouting mat of Oenothera Missouriensis (Ozark Sundrops). As the tulip foliage ripens, the Oenothera grows up and then blooms in July.

The easiest way to install these combinations is to plant the bulbs first and then cover them with perennials, but don't be afraid to dig through existing groundcovers to install bulbs. You could even lift sections like sod and then replace them after planting bulbs.

In the rock garden, species tulips will push up through mats of Creeping Thyme and in shadier spots, Narcissus will flourish through Periwinkle, Pachysandra or Lamium. Don't hesitate to plant perennials now — just be sure to spread their pot-bound roots so they can start growing into their new surroundings quickly.

Consider these spring blooming perennials as partners for bulbs. In the sun — Alyssum Saxatile, Draba Siberica, Arabis (Wall Cress), Aubrieta (Rock Cress), Armeria (Thrift), Aquilegia (Columbine), Bergenia, Doronicum (Leopard's Bane), Euphorbia Polychroma (Cushion Spurge), Pulsatilla Vulgaris (Pasque Flower), Phlox Subulata (Moss Phlox), and the short creeping types of Veronica.

In shadier spots — Pulmonaria (Lungwort), Helleborus (Christmas Rose), Dicentra (Bleeding Heart), Epimedium (Barrenwort), Primula (Primroses), Tiarella (Foam Flowers), Geranium Sylvaticum, Phlox Stobonifera and Veronica (Georgian Blue).

Some good perennials to use to camouflage ripening bulb foliage are Peonies, Tall Geranium (Cranesbills), Hosta, Ornamental Grasses, Siberian Iris and Hemerocallis (Daylilies).

Don't be afraid to plant short early bulbs (such as crocus) at the back of your borders — they will bloom before the tall perennials begin to grow and you will never see their fading foliage. Instead of planting a clump of bulbs beside a perennial, plant bulbs in S-shaped drifts around

perennials. The draw for the two Boxes of Bulbs donated by the Netherlands Flowerbulb Information Centre will be made on Oct. 1. Your letters must be received at the address below by Sept. 30. Even if I have not had time to answer your questions in this column, rest assured that previously sent letters will be included in the draw.

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