

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Homan October 8, 2021

Post Rock Extension District Horticulture Agent

Now is the Time to Plant Spring Flowering Bulbs

One of the many joys of gardening is watching our landscapes come to life again in the spring. Bulbs are often the first plants to make an appearance in the spring and add a beautiful pop of color to the landscape. Enjoying these spring beauties means a little extra work planting them in the fall, then practically forgetting about them until spring.

With the onset of cooler weather, it's the perfect time to plant spring flowering bulbs. For north central Kansas, late September through October is an ideal time in our climate hardiness zone. If you want to add a minimal care, showy plant, into your landscape follow these tips for mastering bulbs.

In the fall bulbs show up everywhere, they can be found in garden stores, ordered from catalogs, or picked up in local supermarkets. When choosing bulbs, you want to examine each one for quality. It should be firm with a papery covering and free from mold. Look for bulbs that are large, the larger the bulb the bigger and more beautiful the bloom will be. You could choose a diverse number of varieties to bloom throughout the spring and summer or for a mass design that will pop, stick to one or two varieties. If deer or wildlife are a problem in your garden, you should choose bulbs such as allium, crocus, iris, and daffodil. Have fun when picking bulbs by choosing new cultivars or even trading with neighbors.

Fall is the best time to plant bulbs because they need to develop their roots and must meet a chilling requirement over the winter in order to bloom in the spring. Pick a site where the bulbs will receive full sun to partial shade. The soil needs to have good aeration and adequate drainage. A sandy loam is preferred but you can always amend your soil type by adding peat moss, compost, or aged bark. The depth of planting varies by the size and variety of bulb. A general rule is 2-3 times deep as the bulb is wide. For example, if you are planting a tulip or hyacinth bulb set them about 6 inches into the soil. Space the bulbs using the same general measurement. After placing the bulbs at the proper depth, replace half the soil and add water. This will settle the soil around the bulbs and provide good bulb to soil contact. Add the remaining soil and water again. Although there will be no top growth in the fall, the roots are developing, so soil needs to

be kept moist but not wet. Always remember to place the bulb with the point up, so the roots are in the right position. When planting it is best to add a fertilizer such as bone meal that is high in phosphorus in the bottom of each planting hole.

Bulbs are relatively low maintenance, you can practically plant them in the fall and forget about them until they pop up in the spring. Check once in a while to make sure the soil is moist but not soggy. Small bulbs will also benefit from adding a layer of mulch to prevent being heaved out of soil by alternate freezing and thawing. In the spring, after blooming, cut off flowers that have faded but don't cut the leaves until they have turned yellow and withered. This allows more energy to be transferred and stored in the bulb.

Bulbs are fun and easy to work with. They require minimal care once properly planted, they will reward you every spring with a wonderful show of color. K-State Research and Extension has a variety of resources for all your gardening and landscaping needs. Stop by or give us a call with your questions.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at choman@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (738-3597).