



BULBS WELL ADAPTED TO

These brave flowers hibernate through winter to paint joyous spring colors

By Jennifer Thompson

I do love spring. The flowering bulbs! Seeing the first flowers of the season glowing in my flowerbeds in mid-March at 7,200 feet elevation gladdens my heart. I start to believe winter may indeed come to an end.

A good number of my bulbs are snow iris, snow drops, crocus, species tulips, and daffodils. I find horticultural variety to be one of the spices of life so I have about 50+ different varieties. Bulbs are easy to plant, and those I prefer require little maintenance.

Bulbs are a reasonable choice for Wyoming landscapes because they are often adapted to climates similar to ours – harsh winters, dry summers, and wetter springs.

The Bulb Lifecycle

Their active, aboveground growing season is in the spring when they put out leaves and flowers. As their blooms brighten the landscapes, their leaves turn sunlight into food storage reserves, which are sent to their bulbs below. As summer comes along, the leaves turn brown and dry up while their bulbs hang out well below the soil surface, safe from the dryness and heat of summer. In the fall, they put out roots and then head into winter insulated from the harshest weather. As spring arrives, they begin their life-cycle journey again.

Species tulips follow this cycle and are an example of the hardiness of spring bulbs.

Many of us think of the moderate

climate of Holland when we think of tulips; however, the hardy species of this plant are native to areas such as western China, central Asia, the Caucasus Mountains, parts of Turkey, and southeastern Europe. These petite wonders (species tulips are generally shorter and smaller-flowered than typical tulips) are well-adapted to the often remote, inhospitable regions they inhabit.

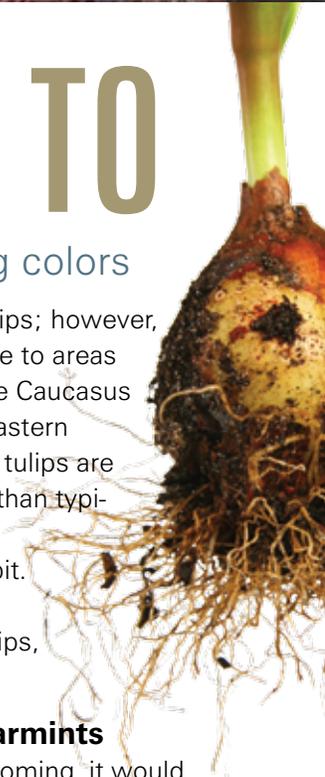
Some of the best-adapted bulbs to our droughty conditions are species tulips, snow iris, and crocus.

A Problem – They're Tasty to Varmints

If bulbs have an Achilles heel in Wyoming, it would be their tastiness to critters, critters, and critters. It turns out about every critter likes to eat a tulip. The flowers get eaten by deer and antelope, and underground travelers such as pocket gophers find the bulbs tasty and nutritious. A few bulbs have a reputation for being more critter resistant. These include snow drops, snowflakes, daffodils, colchicums (fall blooming crocus), and alliums (these last may be deer resistant, but they fell prey to pocket gophers in my garden). Many of these bulbs contain bad tasting and/or poisonous substances.

There are only a few tips to remember when planting bulbs beyond reading the planting depth information that comes with them.

First – Most spring-blooming bulbs (though not all) prefer full sun and reasonably well-drained soil. Small bulbs can be planted in areas shaded by many deciduous trees (the bulbs bloom and the leaves grow before the trees cast a lot of shade); however, they might not be quite as vigorous as those out in the open.





OUR INHOSPITABLE CLIMATE

Second – Plan ahead and, if you can, mark where they should go during the spring (I use plastic sticks to mark the available space). This is because by the time fall arrives any old bulb foliage will be long gone, and you might have a hard time remembering where the available real estate is.

Third – Placement. Bulbs often look best when planted in clumps (groups of five, seven, or more). This creates more visual impact than a single bulb here or there. Some of my favorite bulbs will actually increase their number when growing in conditions appropriate for them, forming larger and denser clumps as the years go by.

Bulb Foliage a Factor in Placement

Another factor in placement has to do with bulb foliage. With many spring-blooming bulbs, the foliage lingers long after the flowers. Some folks consider this unsightly. However, the foliage must remain in place until it starts yellowing and turns brown. While it's green, the foliage is sending food down to the bulb for next year. If the foliage is cut off too soon in multiple years, the bulb will starve. Placing clumps of bulbs behind other perennial plants gets around this dilemma. The perennials will emerge after the bulbs have flowered, and their growing leaves and stems will block the view of the bulb foliage so it's not as obvious. You can also plant bulbs within clumps of shallow-rooted perennials.

If you haven't used bulbs in your landscape, buy a sampling of species and try them. Rank the winners and losers in the spring and plant more of the best performers that fall. Soon, you, too, will be looking for the first splash of color that means spring is really on its way!



Some good performers in my landscapes:

- Snow drops (*Galanthus nivalis*)
- Crocus ancyrensis* 'Golden Bunch'
- Crocus chrysanthus* 'Snow Bunting'
- Crocus tommasinianus* 'Ruby Giant'
- Dutch crocus (*Crocus vernus*)
- Snow Iris - *Iris histrioides* 'George'
- Snow Iris - *Iris reticulata* 'Pixie', 'Harmony'
- Tulips (species and others):
 - Tulipa linifolia*
 - Tulipa clusiana* (Lady Tulip)
 - Tulipa batalinii* ('Bright Gem', 'Yellow Jewel')
 - Tulipa greigii* (has mottled-colored leaves)
 - Tulipa kaufmanniana* ('Early Harvest')
 - Tulipa fosterianas*
 - Tulipa* 'Little Beauty'
- Lily – Flowered Tulips
- Darwin Hybrid Tulips ('Apeldoorn')
- Daffodils ('Tete-a-tete', 'Jetfire', 'Marieke')

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