

Light Up Your Garden with Bulbs

Written by Lanier Laney

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It's not too early to start thinking about bulbs. I was amazed when I first moved to Beaufort that many of the bulbs that bloom everywhere else in the spring, actually start blooming here in December.



December 4th is when I saw the first Paperwhite Narcissus bloom last year. Spring comes surprisingly early in Beaufort, compared to other parts of the state, because our Zone 8 weather is the same as Northern Florida's. That's great for lots of plants, but bulbs that generally like it cooler can be more of a challenge here. Certain bulbs like tulips have to be refrigerated for 6 to 8 weeks and don't carry over well, along with crocus, which don't repeat well here.

Paperwhites are very fragrant small members of the Narcissus family, of which Daffodils and Jonquils are the larger family members; you will see large established clumps in some of the older neighborhoods downtown. They seem to look better in informal groupings than rows. One trick is to take a handful of bulbs, toss them, and then plant them where they land. Over time the 'mother' bulbs will produce 'daughter' bulbs and the clumps will increase in size.

You will see bulbs showing up in stores in a few weeks. But the best time to plant here is the last two weeks in October. If you want to grow varieties other than the usual ones, now's the time to go online to mail order sources like John Scheepers Dutch Flower Bulb Company and take a look at the hundreds of varieties to choose from: www.johnscheepers.com/catview

Other mail order sources of bulbs are White Flower Farm and Van Engelen Inc.



They also have 'bulb food' or 'bulb buster' fertilizer. These are typically low in nitrogen because a lot of nitrogen will just give you excessive leaf growth at the expense of flower production. Wood ash from the fireplace can also be used as a source of potassium which bulbs like when mixed in with the soil of the planting beds. Other types of bulbs that can be planted in late October include Anemone, Ranunculus, Hyacinths, Iris, Jonquils, Dutch Iris, & Snow Drops, just to name a few. Amaryllis are usually planted later in November as are new Canna Tubers.

When planting bulbs, a good rule of thumb is to plant them three times the size of the bulb deep. And you aren't really supposed to grow bulbs in the same spot year after year as it can create nematode problems.



I hope you have fun with the wonderful world of bulbs. Just try some different varieties and see what 'takes' in different areas of your garden. I've had bulbs barely flower in one spot, despite all the babying in the world, while in another spot, the same bulb can just go gangbusters year after year with little or no care. Now's the time to start thinking about what bulbs you like and

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seeing what's out there. Otherwise, you can end up like me in years past when I started too late, then said to myself, "Why didn't I think about bulbs?!" as other peoples' gardens burst forth with flowers in December and January.