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Spring bulbs help make the winter go by faster

Winter is long and bitter here in New England so I try to think of ways to shorten it. One is by planting spring bulbs that promise the days of sun and roses are not too far off.

If you are going to have snowdrops peeking through the ice, or daffodils nodding their sunny heads, or scillas reflecting those brilliant blue spring skies, you have to get to work right now.

NARCISSUS is the family name of narcissus, daffodils and jonquils. All of these flowers are hardy, require little fussing and will multiply and bloom for many years.

Although narcissus are not the earliest blooming bulbs, they should be planted by mid-October because they produce their new roots most actively in the early fall. It's important to give them enough time to form a strong root system before the ground freezes hard.

Daffodils come in varied forms and shades of white and yellow. There are standards like beautiful, big, white Mount Hood with a pale creamy trumpet, and the giant golden King Alfred.

Some daffodils like Sun Chariot, Kilworth, Prof. Albert Einstein and Geranium have startling vivid orange cups. Others, like Romance, Pink Champion and Pink Rim, are surprising because of their delicate pink shades. There are tall varieties like Spellbinder (20") or miniatures like April Tears (7") and Tete a Tete (5"). Whatever narcissus, jonquil, daffodil you choose it should be planted in a well drained soil in a fairly sunny location. They are not fussy, but fertilizing with compost or bone meal is beneficial.

As a rule of thumb, you can safely plant a bulb at a depth of three times the diameter of the bulb

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Between
The Rows

This means that you will plant the average sized daffodil bulb so that the top of the bulb is 8 inches below the surface. I have talked to people who have naturalized large areas of daffodils and they feel that slightly deeper plantings cannot hurt. A deeper planting can help thwart rodents and encourage a vigorous growth.

The "little bulbs," scillas (squills), snowdrops, crocus, snowflakes, glory of the snow, winter aconite and grape hyacinths, bloom earlier than the narcissus, but they can be planted right into November.

The crocus is probably the most common spring bulb, because it has a substantial blue, white or yellow blossom and is so happy to bloom early in the season for many years with very little care. Plant the bulbs about 4 inches deep and 4 inches apart in an area where you have sun or very light shade and ordinary, well drained garden soil.

Snowdrops will bloom right through the snow — if the snow is no deeper than their height of 4 inches. Snowflakes are a little bigger and they bloom a little later, but the pendant white flowers are sim-

ilar. Both should be planted 4 inches deep and 4 inches apart and will tolerate a fairly heavy, wet soil.

I'm particularly partial to the squills (*Scilla siberica*) and grape hyacinths, because I love their brilliant blue color. Plant them as you would the other small bulbs. The squills especially have such small delicate flowers that they should be planted in masses. I wouldn't recommend starting out by planting less than 25. They will multiply rapidly.

Grape hyacinths produce a more substantial flower of intense blue on a 5-inch spike.

I don't think it's a good idea to plant spring bulbs in the flower border, because after blooming, you have to leave the green, then dying foliage for at least six to eight weeks to insure that the bulbs remain strong and vigorous for more years of bloom before you cut it down. However, there are some people who prefer to put them in the border because they hide the dying foliage with perennials and annuals that are just getting going when the bulbs are done.

Bulbs can be planted in their own beds, or they can be planted where they can multiply and naturalize. Though daffodils need a place of their own where they can spread out and where the dying foliage won't be an eyesore. The little bulbs can be planted right in the lawn and allowed to naturalize.

Wherever you plant them, spring bulbs reflect the spring sky and sun, warming and cheering, even though temperatures are still frosty.



The wooder's guide