

# SPRING FLOWERING BULBS FOR KENTUCKY GARDENS

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Spring flowering bulbs are an important part of the landscape in Kentucky. Crocus and daffodils tell us that spring is on its way and red tulips are a Derby Day tradition. These flowers are recognized by most people but there are many other spring flowering bulbs that can be used around your home.

Hundreds of different kinds of flower bulbs are available for fall planting. You may obtain them from mail order bulb companies, garden centers, supermarkets or department stores. Some are familiar and others have long, hard-to-pronounce names. Generally, spring flowering bulbs do very well the first spring after they are planted. Yet, many home gardeners want the bulbs to come back year after year or naturalize in their home landscape.

Continuing trials at the UK College of Agriculture's Arboretum and Horticulture Research Farm have focused on the naturalization of spring flowering bulbs. Bulbs planted in various sites and given different types of care have been observed through four spring flowering seasons. The following list of recommended bulbs for Kentucky landscapes is based on these trials.

## Planting Site

Well-drained sites are essential. Established gardens and beds or newly cultivated areas are fine. The soil pH should be 6.0 to 7.0. Bulbs will not do well in heavy clay soils, so poor soils should be amended with compost, peat moss or other organic matter. Most bulbs prefer a site that does not receive full sunlight in the middle of the day. This reduces water stress on hot spring days to extend flower life and allows the bulbs to mature properly after flowering. Only bulbs that flower very early in the spring should be planted directly in the lawn. All other bulbs perform best and are easier to maintain when planted in mulched beds. Flower bulbs should be planted in groups so the mass of color increases visibility. Small bulbs should be planted in groups of at least 10 to 12 while large bulbs can be planted with as few as 5 to 6 bulbs in a group. Bulbs that flower at different times can be inter-planted in the same area. If you desire “perennialization” or naturalization of your bulbs, avoid planting near heated basements. Bulbs can be used as annuals or perennials in beds, in ground covers, in rock gardens or under trees and shrubs.

## Fall Planting Techniques

Plan to plant spring flowering bulbs between October 15 and Thanksgiving. Start by cultivating and cleaning the planting site. Small sized bulbs (about 1 inch) should be planted in holes 5 inches deep and 1 to 4 inches apart. Large bulbs (2 inches or more) should be planted in holes 8 inches deep and 4 to 8 inches apart. These planting depths will help protect the bulbs from frost, animals and physical damage due



Wind Flower – ‘Radar’



Grape Hyacinth

to hoeing. Thoroughly loosen the soil under the bulbs and mix in one handful of bone meal per square foot (1 oz/sq ft). Place bulbs upright in the hole (generally pointed side up) and cover bulbs with half of the soil removed from the hole. Water the bulbs thoroughly and replace the remaining soil. Fertilize the soil surface with 10-10-10 (N-P-K) at a rate of 3 to 4 pounds per 100 square feet. Cover the bed with 2 to 3 inches of mulch and water thoroughly again. If the fall weather is dry, water the area as needed.



Glory of the Snow



Hyacinths in the landscape

### Spring Care

As soon as the plants emerge in the spring, fertilize the area with 10-10-10 (N-P-K) fertilizer at a rate of 1 to 2 pounds per 100 square feet. After the flower petals fade or fall off, remove the flower organs with a scissors or knife. Allow the remaining foliage to die naturally. Bulbs will not mature properly when the foliage is removed prematurely. When early to late flowering bulbs are planted directly in the lawn, the foliage generally cannot be removed when the grass is first ready to mow. This can create an unsightly area and a maintenance nuisance. Splitting or harvesting bulbs is generally not advised, yet many home gardeners have been successful with these procedures for years. If the bulbs flowered satisfactorily in the spring, do not disturb them. If they need to be moved, dig them when the foliage has yellowed and died. Store the bulbs in a relatively dry and ventilated location until fall planting time.



Spanish Bluebell



'Flaming Parrot' Tulip



'Unsurpassable' Daffodil



Giant Allium

### Bulb Selection

Many spring flowering bulbs are successful garden flowers in Kentucky. Over 100 cultivars and species were evaluated from 1969 to 1973 in our trial gardens. To select flower bulbs for your garden, consider flowering time, flower color and plant height. Crocus, daffodils and grape hyacinths are common plants that grow readily and naturalize in most gardens. Tulips and hyacinths are also common and available but these will naturalize only in the better garden locations as described above. The specific conditions to assure naturalization of tulips have not been identified so tulips will generally have to be replaced every 2 to 4 years. Many other unfamiliar bulbs will naturalize readily in Kentucky gardens. These bulbs will become more familiar to Kentucky gardeners as people try them and have success with them.

## Recommended Flower Bulbs for Kentucky Gardens

Average Flowering Period	Plant Name	Flower Color	Plant Height (inches)
<b>Very Early Season</b>			
March 10	<b>Dwarf iris</b> <i>Iris danfordiae</i>	Yellow	4
March 15	<b>Dwarf iris</b> <i>Iris reticulata</i> 'Harmony' and 'J.S. Dijt'	Blue and purple	4
March 15	<b>Crocus</b> <i>Crocus flavus</i>	Yellow	4
March 20	<b>Crocus</b> <i>Crocus vernus</i> (many cultivars)	Blue, yellow, white	4
March 25	<b>Glory-Of-The-Snow</b> <i>Chionodoxa lucilae</i>	Blue with white eye	4
<b>Early Season</b>			
April 5	<b>Wind Flower</b> , <i>Anemone blanda</i> 'Rosea'	Rose	5
April 10	<b>Wind Flower</b> , <i>Anemone blanda</i> 'White Splendor'	White	5
April 5	<b>Daffodil, Jonquil</b> , <i>Narcissus cyclamineus</i> 'February Gold'	Yellow	14
April 10	<b>Daffodil, Jonquil</b> , <i>Narcissus jonquilla</i> (many cultivars)	Yellow, white, orange	20
April 5	<b>Hyacinth</b> , <i>Hyacinthus</i> 'Carnegie'	White and blue	15
April 10	<b>Siberian Squill</b> , <i>Scilla siberica</i> 'Spring Beauty'	Deep blue	6
April 10	<b>Botanical Tulip</b> , <i>Tulipa</i> 'The First'	Red and white	6
April 15	<b>Botanical Tulip</b> , <i>Tulipa</i> 'Margaret Herbst'	Red	14
April 15	<b>Botanical Tulip</b> , <i>Tulipa purissima</i>	White	18
April 15	<b>Spring Starflower</b> , <i>Tritelia uniflora</i>	Light blue	6
<b>Mid Season</b>			
April 25	<b>Trout Lily</b> , <i>Erythronium</i> 'Pagoda'	Yellow	6
April 25	<b>Crown Imperial</b> , <i>Fritillaria imperialis</i>	Red, yellow	30
April 20	<b>Grape Hyacinth</b> , <i>Muscari armeniacum</i>	Dark blue	8
April 20	<b>Grape Hyacinth</b> , <i>Muscari armeniacum</i> 'Blue Spike'	Dark blue, double	8
April 25	<b>Tulips - double early, Triumph, Darwin hybrids, single late, lily-flowered, parrot, double late, botanical</b> <i>Tulipa</i> 'Elizabeth Arden' <i>Tulipa</i> 'General Eisenhower' <i>Tulipa</i> 'Halcro' <i>Tulipa</i> 'Yellow Dover'	Pink Red Magenta Yellow	24 24 24 24

May 10	<b>Star of Bethlehem</b> , <i>Ornithogalum umbellatum</i>	White	6
May 10	<b>Spanish Blue Bells</b> , <i>Scilla campanulata</i>	White, pink, blue	12
<b>Late Season</b>			
May 15	<b>Quamash</b> , <i>Camassia esculenta</i>	Blue	10
May 25	<b>Ornamental Onion</b> , <i>Allium christophii</i>	Silvery purple	24
June 1	<b>Ornamental Onion</b> , <i>Allium giganteum</i>	Deep lavender	45
May 25	<b>Ornamental Onion</b> , <i>Allium karataviense</i>	Lilac	10
June 20	<b>Ornamental Onion</b> , <i>Allium sphaerocephalum</i>	Reddish purple	30
June 10	<b>Triplet Lily</b> , <i>Brodiaea laxa</i> 'Queen Fabiola'	Blue	12

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