

# COMMON BULB PROBLEMS

by Ron Cornwell  
Horticulture Educator  
University of Illinois Extension



## Daffodils

If your daffodils develop undersized flowers or fail to bloom, there's a good chance that one of these 4 problems might be the culprit.

1. **Overcrowding** — The daffodil bulbs continue to multiply each year producing more plants in a smaller space. The first indication of this overcrowding will be undersized flowers and foliage development on some clumps with no bloom. To correct this situation the bulbs need to be divided and replanted. Digging and replanting daffodils every four years should prevent overcrowding.
2. **Undersized Bulbs** — If you plant undersized bulbs, the result can be foliage production and no bloom the first year or two after planting. An undersized bulb may not have enough energy available to produce both leaves and bloom. As the bulb increases in size, the bulb will eventually bloom.
3. **High Temperature** — If daffodils are exposed to prolonged high temperatures (above 80°F.), there is the possibility of damage to the flower embryo inside the bulb. Exposure to high temperatures can occur when you plant the bulbs extremely shallow or with improper storage. This problem can be avoided by planting bulbs at recommended depths and storing bulbs properly.
4. **Foliage Removed Too Soon** — After the daffodil flowers, the remaining foliage continues to capture the sun's rays to manufacture food for new bulbs and next year's flowers. If the foliage is removed before it starts to die back naturally, the new bulbs may not have enough energy stored to flower properly.

## Hyacinth

Occasionally, we encounter these problems with the hyacinth.

1. **Short Flower Stems** — During springs that have unseasonably warm temperatures, the flowers of the hyacinth are stimulated to develop and open before the stem has time to fully elongate. This results in a flower on a very short stem.
2. **Lack of Foliage** — If the hyacinth fails to produce foliage in the spring, look for bulb rot or rodent damage.

## Tulips

Below are some of the reasons that tulips fail to bloom or have poor bloom. Some of these reasons are the same as daffodils.

1. **Undersized Bulbs** — (*see daffodils*)
2. **Foliage Removed Too Soon** — (*see daffodils*)
3. **Lack of Cooling** — Tulip bulbs require a minimum exposure of six weeks of cool temperatures to flower properly. This cooling period needs temperatures of 40 to 50°F. or cooler. Gardeners in the Midwest usually don't have a problem with bulbs failing to bloom due to lack of cooling. But there is one exception. Occasionally, a gardener will purchase bulbs in the fall and forget to plant them until spring. These bulbs will not bloom until the following spring.
4. **Overcrowding** — After flowering, the original bulb usually disintegrates and several daughter bulbs are formed. If the bulb is planted too shallow or is over-crowded, daughter bulbs may develop. These bulbs are too small to produce a flower, producing foliage only.
5. **No Foliage Growth** — If a bulb fails to produce foliage in the spring, dig up the bulb and check for the problem. The two most common reasons for lack of foliage growth are bulb rot and rodent damage.