

BULBS FOR ALL SEASONS

Ron Cornwell
Horticulture Educator
University of Illinois Extension



Autumn Bloom

Autumn Crocus (*Colchicum autumnale*)

There are many species of autumn-blooming plants in the genus *Colchicum*. These bulbs are corms and are often called autumn crocus because their cupped flower shape resembles the spring flowering crocus. *Colchicum* are easy to distinguish from crocuses as *Colchicum* have six stamens and crocuses only have three stamens. The bulb most often available from garden centers and catalogs is *Colchicum autumnale*.

Colchicum autumnale produces leaves in the spring. When the flowers emerge in the fall, the plant is leafless. The flower is white or pink to a purple lilac.

This bulb needs to be planted in early September and growth will begin right away. The bulb should bloom the fall that you plant it. Autumn crocus may be planted in a ground cover or in combination with ferns.

More information: <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod03/01700256.html>

Winter Bloom

Common Snowdrops (*Galanthus nivalis*)

The common snowdrop is very hardy and seems impervious to winter weather in Illinois. It is the first bulb up, emerging in February in the St. Louis area. Flowers can be covered by snowfall. When the snow melts, they reappear unharmed.

The snowdrop has a pendant, six-petal flower. The three inner petals are always shorter than the outer petals. The inner petals are notched at the tip, with a green marking around this notch extending over the tip.



Once the snowdrop is planted, it should be left alone for several years.

The only reason to dig snowdrops is when you want more of them. Propagation involves digging and dividing the bulbs immediately after flowering while the foliage is still green. With other bulbs, the bulbs are dug after the foliage dies back. The bulbs should be replanted immediately after digging.

This is an excellent plant to use for any part of the garden. They can be used on the edge of woodland areas or in bold numbers in front of borders. Snowdrops also make an excellent container plant.

More information: http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/Iplant/plant_select/bulbs/bulbs4.htm

Winter Aconite (*Eranthis hyemalis*)

The winter aconite is an attractive, rapidly spreading, small, yellow-flowering plant. This plant grows from tubers that are pea size. The leaves form a rosette as they lie on the soil and act almost as a calyx for the flowers. The flowers grow on short stems reaching 3 to 4 inches in height.

The winter aconite flowers shortly after snowdrops start to bloom. This little bulb is very hardy to the cold conditions of late winter in Illinois.

Once planted, these bulbs should not be disturbed.

When division is desired, lift and divide the bulbs as soon as they finish flowering. Separate them into small clumps rather than individual tubers. It will take this bulb a year or more to re-establish.

These bulbs do well in wooded areas if they receive adequate light and moisture. The high canopy of deciduous trees is desirable. If planted in a shrub border, plant under or near deciduous shrubs. And, plant them far enough away from evergreens that they receive adequate sunlight.

This bulb combines well with crocus and early-flowering shrubs such as witch hazel. Winter aconite is an excellent plant for semi-shaded garden borders and at the edge of woodland areas.



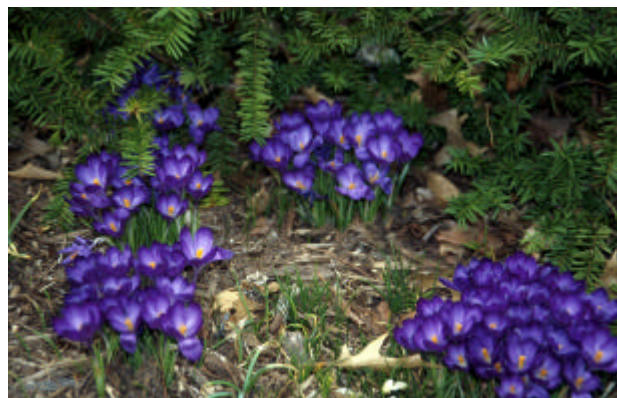
Crocus

The crocus is probably the most popular small bulb used in the landscape. Crocus is tolerant of a wide range of soils but must have good drainage. This plant does well in full sun or partial shade locations, but it performs poorly in full shade locations.

Crocuses do well naturalized in grassy areas. By the time the grass needs to be cut in the spring, the crocuses have made their leaf growth. While it is preferable to wait as long as possible before cutting their leaves, the leaves can usually be cut before the lawn becomes unsightly.

When division of crocus is desired, the corms should be lifted as soon as the foliage starts to die down. The new corms formed on the top or side of the old corms can be separated and immediately replanted at the appropriate spacing. Corms that are lifted when overcrowded will produce more offsets than plant clumps that are not occasionally lifted.

Crocuses are ideal plants for both spring and fall color. While the spring varieties are best known, the autumn and winter species have a place in the fall and winter landscape. Crocuses are eye-stoppers in large naturalized plantings. They work well in shrub borders and at the front of perennial borders. If you add crocuses to a perennial bed, be careful not to over-water. When a perennial border is watered throughout the growing season and the crocus bulbs lie in a continuously-moist area, the bulbs can rot. Crocuses can also be considered as a container plant for early spring color on decks or other locations.



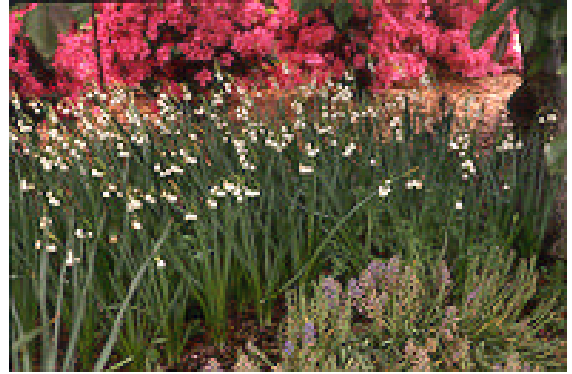
Spring Bloom

Spring Snowflake (*Leucojum vernum*)

This genus of bulbs has two species for consideration in the garden. These include the spring snowflake (*Leucojum vernum*) and the summer snowflake (*Leucojum aestivum*).

Once leucojum bulbs are planted, they should be left undisturbed. They will not require division for many years. They need adequate moisture during the growing season.

The spring snowflake naturalizes easily in grassy areas. This plant establishes easily under deciduous shrubs or trees. The summer snowflake is a hardy species that doesn't flower until mid- to late spring.



Glory of the Snow (*Chionodoxa*)

Glory of the Snow is one of the finest of the early flowering bulbs. The leaves on this plant are few in number focusing all of the attention to the showy, early season bloom. The majority of the plants available will be blue with various splashes of white on the petals, but pink and white forms of this plant are also available.

If you start with large bulbs, this plant will produce more than one flower spike per bulb. Smaller bulbs must be left in the ground for a number of seasons before more than one spike per bulb will be produced.

Lift and divide only when overcrowded. Glory of the Snow can be used at the edge of borders, in rock gardens, or even in containers for early spring color.



Grecian Windflower (*Anemone blanda*)

The Grecian windflowers are spring flowering tubers that prefer to be located in filtered shade. There are several cultivars available. One of the best to try in the garden is White Splendour. This is one of the largest flowering cultivars. It has pure white flowers that remain in bloom longer than other cultivars.

The Grecian windflower tuber needs well-drained soil. Plant the tubers in early fall and water them to start tuber growth. Once the plant starts to grow in the spring, water on a regular basis until the foliage dies down—unless Mother Nature provides adequate water.

Leave the tubers in the ground and only lift if they become overcrowded. If lifting becomes necessary, allow the foliage to die down and then transplant the small tubers that have formed.



Siberian Squill (*Scilla siberica*)

Siberian squill is a bulb that will tolerate cold weather, blooming in March in the St. Louis area.

Siberian squill has a blue, star-shaped flower on a 4-inch stem. The ribbon-like foliage matures quickly, making this a good plant for the front of the border or naturalizing in a lawn.

Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari*)

Nothing creates a blanket of blue in the spring garden quite like the grape hyacinth. This plant has little fragrance with blue being the major color, though white is available. It is also an inexpensive bulb.

Grape hyacinth bulbs will usually begin to increase rapidly after the second growing season. If the planted area becomes overcrowded and needs to be divided, lift the bulbs after the foliage dies back, usually in early July, and replant. Surplus bulbs can be used in other areas of the garden.

Grape hyacinth can be used along the front of perennial borders, shrub beds and with other bulb plantings. These bulbs make a striking accent to any planting in the spring.



Checkered Lily (*Fritillaria meleagris*)

The checkered lily needs to be planted in a location that holds moisture throughout the year. This is an excellent plant to use in a partially shaded garden with soil that is high in organic matter.



Crown Imperial (*Fritillaria imperialis*)

The crown imperial is a very showy plant. The flowers are grouped on top of a strong stem that is topped by a tuft of leaves. Some people find this plant objectionable because both the bulb and the flower have a rotting smell. Yet, this plant can make a striking accent plant in any garden.

Once planted, this bulb should not be disturbed. It requires a well-drained soil. Gardeners with tight clay soil may find this bulb hard to grow unless drainage is improved. After flowering and complete drying of the leaves, the stems should be cut off just above the ground.



Daffodil (*Narcissus*)

Generations of gardeners have considered daffodils the most trouble-free of spring flowering bulbs. Given minimum care at planting time, bulbs will grow, bloom, and thrive with virtually no further attention. They do not require summer watering and only need to be divided every 3 to 5 years.

Daffodils should be planted in the fall with the base of the bulb 8 inches deep in a planting bed. If the bulb is naturalized, the base of the bulb should be 6 inches below the soil surface. The foliage should be cut back in the late spring once it starts to yellow and die back.

Daffodils are very versatile bulbs. Plant them in mixed borders of annuals and perennials, under deciduous trees and shrubs, or even beneath ground covers that grow loosely enough to let the plants come through. You can also naturalize daffodils beneath deciduous trees or in open, grassy meadows

More information: <http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/hort/g06610.htm>

Tulip (*Tulipa*)

The most popular spring-flowering bulb is the tulip. It offers an extended flowering season and a wide variety of colors and forms. With proper selection, some types of tulips can be flowering in your yard for two months each spring.

Most tulips do well the first year after planting; but, unless cultural conditions are good, the flower show in succeeding years will be diminished. Competition from dense shade and with tree roots makes planting beneath trees seldom worthwhile.

Tulip bulbs generally are not long lived. However, deep planting (base of bulb 8 inches deep) and proper spring care will prolong their usefulness. Never remove the leaves until the foliage has completely turned yellow. Removing the foliage from the plant while it is still green will cause smaller bulbs to form. Allowing seedpods to form will also result in smaller bulbs. After the foliage has yellowed, cut it off at ground level and remove it from the garden area.

Tulips will brighten up the landscape in the spring. Plant tulips in borders using background foliage of other spring plants to help play down the yellowing foliage as it matures. Tulips also work well planted in beds and other areas of the landscape.

More information: <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/hyg-fact/1000/1237.html>

Summer Bloom

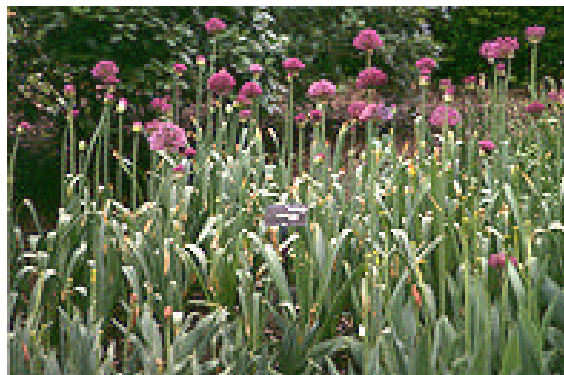
Flowering Onion (*Allium*)

Alliums are flowering onions. The plants in this group have the distinctive onion smell, both in the foliage and bulb. Leaves are cylindrical and hollow. Flowers are individually small. These small flowers make up a flower head that can reach considerable size on some plants.

Ornamental alliums are interesting garden plants.

The allium giganteum is the tallest of the group with flower stalks reaching 3 to 5 feet, terminating in a purple flower head that can reach 5 inches across. The allium aflatunense

is another good choice for the garden. This plant is similar to the giant allium but is smaller in size and has smaller blooms. These large species can be used as accent plants in the garden. Some of the smaller species like allium molly are good naturalizers but need room to grow. The flower heads of many of the alliums are unusual and attractive additions to most floral arrangements. Allow stalks to ripen fully before cutting for floral arrangements.



Garden Lily (*Lilium species*)

Garden lilies are an easy-to-grow, colorful addition to your garden. They provide an abundance of flowers during the late-June to early-July time period. The garden lily is a true bulb.

The garden lily prefers full sun, but will grow in partial shade. Bulbs should be planted in the fall. They need to be planted in a well-drained soil.

The garden lily is excellent used as a single specimen plant or planted in solid masses. This plant can be planted in a border or along a garden fence. The taller-growing species fit well behind a planting of shorter-growing perennials or a planting of shorter garden lilies.

More information: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/DG1112.html>

Fancy-Leafed Caladium (*Caladium x hortulanum*)

The fancy-leafed caladium is a tender tuber that adds striking color in shaded areas of perennial gardens. The plant will not survive Illinois winters, so it has to be handled like an annual when used outside.

The caladium has deep green foliage intricately patterned with green, white, pink, and red. Its gorgeous leaves come in variegated, colorful patterns to add drama to the outdoor garden.

Before first frost, dig up the tender tubers, leaving the soil that adheres to their roots. Dry them in an airy place away from sun for one week. Then remove the dead foliage and excess soil, and store them in dry peat moss over the winter.

More information: <http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/hil/hil-8517.html>

Iris (*Iris*)

Irises are among the earliest blooming and easiest plants to grow. Probably the most popular and widely grown iris is the tall, bearded type. “Bearded” refers to the presence of a furry strip on each of the three drooping flower petals.

The iris needs full sun. Well-drained soil is also important with this plant to prevent rotting of the rhizomes.

Irises can be divided and replanted in August. Division should be done every three years. The iris rhizome should be planted just below the soil surface. At the time of replanting, cut the foliage back to one-third its height.

The iris has two major problems you may encounter. One problem is damage from iris borers, and the other problem is soft rot.

More information: <http://www.ag.ohio-state.edu/~ohioline/hyg-fact/1000/1240.html>

Tuberous Begonias (*Begonia x tuberhybrida*)

The hybrid tuberous begonia is excellent as a bedding plant in shady, protected spots under trees, window boxes, and in hanging baskets or containers.

The flowers come in a wide array of color including white, pink, rose, red, and orange.

The tuberous begonia needs a well-drained soil. Bulbs can be saved from year to year. They need to be dug before the plant is hit with a killing frost. Frost can cause the tuber to turn to mush.

Remove the stems after the plant is dug. Let the tubers air dry for a week, then store over winter.

More information: <http://www.msue.msu.edu/msue/imp/mod03/01700976.html>

Magic Lily (*Lycoris squamigera*)

Lycoris squamigera is sometimes called the magic lily because of its unique habit of growth. After a good soaking rain, the flowering stalks appear so quickly it is as if by magic.

The bulb can be planted in either the spring or fall. Choose a place where the bulbs will not be disturbed because they make a permanent planting that blooms for many years. Plant these bulbs 5 inches deep and about 6 inches apart.

Magic lilies will produce long, strap-like foliage in late May and early June in the St. Louis area. The foliage dies down, and a month later (mid-July), the plant shoots up a 3-foot, leafless stem with 8 to 12 flowers (pink, lavender, red, or white) concentrated at the top.

Magic lilies can be planted in an open woodland among ferns or in a border or bed.

Gladiolus (*Gladiolus x hortulanus*)

Gladioli offer a wide array of flower colors and are often grown for cut flower use. The plants grow and flower best in full sun and moist, well-drained soil. Soils that produce good garden vegetables will also produce good glads.

Space planting times a week apart to have gladiolus in bloom the entire summer. Plant the corms 3 to 6 inches deep, depending on size of the corm.

The corms need to be dug once the tops die back in the fall. They must be dug before a hard freeze. Air dry for 2 to 3 weeks, then remove the old withered corm from the base and discard. Corms should be stored over winter at 45°F. in a well-ventilated area.

More information: <http://muextension.missouri.edu/xplor/agguides/hort/g06620.htm>

Canna (*Canna x generolis*)

Cannas grow 1½ to 5 feet or more, depending on the variety. Their large, glossy green or bronze leaves are 6 to 12 inches wide. Their blossoms are clustered at the top of flower spikes, which can be up to 1 foot long. Blossom size varies with the species planted. Cannas are available in red, rose/pink, yellow, red with yellow, or dark red with bronze foliage.

They make attractive plantings for a large container, in raised beds, or as background plants.

Cannas are considered tender perennials. In the St. Louis area there are some varieties that may survive the mild winters. The standard practice is to dig the rhizomes in the fall after frost has blackened the foliage. Cut the stems off about 3 inches above the rhizomes and let the rhizomes dry for a few days. Store over winter in a cool location. In the spring, plant the rhizomes 3 to 4 inches deep and 1½ to 3 feet apart.

Garden Dahlia (*Dahlia hybrids*)

Dahlias provide one of the widest array of flower colors, sizes, and forms. They range from ½ inch pompoms to the “dinner plate” dahlias that may approach 12 or more inches in diameter.

Dahlias need to be dug and stored after the first frost in the fall. Cut the foliage off so that there remains a 3- or 4-inch stem on the roots. Because tubers may have spread quite a distance, begin digging far enough from the plant so as not to damage the tuber. Store the tuber over winter.

Bring the tubers out of storage in March or April and locate the eyes or buds on each tuber. With a sharp knife, divide the tubers with a portion of the crown attached, so that each piece has from 1 to 3 buds on it. If there is not a viable bud on the tuber piece planted, a plant will not develop.

More information: <http://www.extension.umn.edu/distribution/horticulture/DG1115.html>

Daylily (*Hemerocallis species*)

Daylilies are one of the easiest to grow garden perennials. They survive a wide range of conditions, are practically trouble-free, and can remain undisturbed for many years.

Daylilies may be planted in either the early fall or spring. The advantage of early fall planting is the plant will establish its root system before cold weather and provide full bloom the following season.

Daylilies bring a variety of colors to the landscape. Once the plant is through blooming, the foliage remains for the remainder of the season. Daylilies work well in mass plantings, in borders, or on short, steep banks in the backyard as an alternative plant for erosion control.

Daylilies should be divided when flower production on the plant begins to decrease.

More information: http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/Iplant/plant_select/perennials.htm

For General Bulb Information: http://www.extension.uiuc.edu/Iplant/plant_select/bulbs.htm