



## Summer Flowering Bulbs

Summer flowering bulbs are a great way to extend your season, and are relatively easy to plant and care for.

The key to getting the best out of summer bulbs is to plant them at the right time. Technically, what we commonly refer to as "bulbs" are, in fact, a collection of tubers, corms and rhizomes; including tuberous begonias, dahlia, and gladiolas. These bulbs are not hardy enough to stay safely in the ground in winter, so we have to plant them in late spring and remove them in the fall after blooming.

Summer flowering bulbs don't react well to being stuck in the ground while the soil and air are still cold. By planting them too early, thinking you'll get a head start; you can actually set them back. In the cold, they will start slowly, grow slowly and end up being delayed for the entire season. For those that bloom late in the season, any kind of delay can mean they won't be ready to bloom until well into the fall, which might be too late (especially in our unpredictable Northern Arizona weather!)

So, the trick is to plant them only when the soil in your garden or container has warmed up enough. If you have a soil thermometer, the temperature a few inches beneath the soil should read 16 degrees C. This might mean waiting until late May or even June. A good rule of thumb is if it's time for your Tomatoes to go outdoors, it's also time to plant your summer bulbs.

So, why do we have these bulbs available for sale so early? It has more to do with availability from our suppliers. If we wait to bring them in later, there will be little to choose from. So, you can and should buy them in early spring to get the best varieties. You can either store them in a cool (but not freezing) dry place or you can plant them indoors. Planting them indoors will give them a head start, which in our climate is a really good idea.

You can take these plants outside in their containers on warm days, which will help them become accustomed to the outside conditions. Just make sure to bring them in at night!

When it is time to plant outside, summer bulbs (like all plants) deserve the very best soil conditions. Bulbous plants are not suited to soggy clay soil, as they have a

tendency to rot easily. Therefore, it is important to amend your soil with planting mix or compost, such as **Warner's Custom Planting Mix**.

The best approach is to dig out a trench or a hole where you want to put the bulbs. In general, the bulbs should be planted about three times the depth as the bulb. The package the bulb comes in will tell you the depth for each specific bulb. Start refilling the planting hole with a couple inches of sand or Perlite, then half-fill with compost. Add a handful of organic slow-release fertilizer (**Bone Meal**) for each plant. Stir up the layers with a garden trowel.

Then, make individual planting holes for each bulb. For the plants started indoors, put them deep enough so their stems are buried a bit lower than they were in their containers. Once everything is planted, water them really well.

If you intend to dig and store your bulbs over the winter, or if the bulbs are perennials (such as Lilies, Clematis, or Liatris), you should give them some supplemental fertilizer every month or so during the growing season. Any organic fertilizer low in nitrogen is fine. If you are growing your bulbs as annuals, no feeding is necessary, but a mid-summer dose of fertilizer will give them a second wind.

### **Storing Tender bulbs for the Winter**

1. Keep them dry and above freezing temperatures
2. Don't store in air tight containers that could cause moisture to build up and rot
3. Check regularly for desiccation and mold
4. Remember to label by type and color

Below are more specifics by variety:

**Begonias** – allow a frost to kill the tops, but do not allow the tubers to freeze. Lift and let tubers dry for one week, with about 5 inches of the foliage still intact. Remove excess soil and foliage and store in peat moss or sawdust at 50 degrees f. Move to a sunny spot when shoots appear. Keep evenly moist, but not wet. Plant outside after danger of frost.

**Dahlia** – To store Dahlias, they must be dug before a hard freeze, but their tops may be allowed to die back from a light frost. It's easiest to see the dahlia eyes, for division purposes, within a week after the tops are cut or killed back. These tubers don't like to get completely dried out. Overwinter in peat moss and check monthly

for dehydration. Mist lightly if necessary. Dahlia tubers are usually direct planted into the garden once temperatures warm.

**Gladiolas** – Lift the plants in the fall either when the plants yellow or after the first frost. Cut the stems back to 1 inch and allow the corms to dry. Remove the old, shriveled portion, keeping only the plump corms. These will store easily in peat moss or sand. Plant the bulbs directly in the ground again when the ground warms. Stagger plantings to extend the season of bloom.