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## Flowers from spring-planted bulbs, corms and roots

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### Quick Facts

Some of the most beautiful garden flowers are produced from spring-planted bulbs, corms and roots, including amaryllis, cannas, callas, dahlias, gladiolus, lilies and tuberous begonias.

All these plants are injured by frost.

In locating a flower bed for spring-planted bulbs, consider exposure, soil type, color and height of flowers, and time of flowering.

Dig bulbs, corms or roots in the fall and place in frost-free storage for the winter.

These plants represent a relatively large investment; culture them with care.

## Purchasing Bulbs, Corms and Roots

A better selection of bulbs, corms and roots is possible if purchased early in the spring. Purchasing packaged material makes shopping more convenient and the buyer is reasonably sure that the flowers will be true to their labels. The package, however, should allow the buyer to see the bulbs. Purchasing roots, bulbs and corms from bins allows the buyer to examine and select on an individual basis; however, with many buyers handling this material there is chance for mix-ups. Select only the largest and firmest specimens from bins.

## Soil Preparation

If the soil produced well the previous year, maintain productivity by applying 1 pound of nitrogen and 2 pounds of phosphoric acid or 20 pounds of 5-10-5 analysis fertilizer per 1,000 square feet.

Where compost is available, a 1-inch dressing over the ground prior to spading or roto-tilling is desirable. Ten bushels of well-rotted manure per 1,000 square feet may be applied, but compost fresh manure for one year or more before applying to the flower bed.

## Site Selection

In locating a flower bed for spring-planted bulbs, consider exposure, soil type, color and height of flowers and time of flowering. Deciduous trees that produce little shade in early spring may produce a shade too dense for the growth of any but the most shade-tolerant plants by mid-June. Soil type cannot be changed readily, but it can be modified with fertilizer and organic materials. Color and height should be known so that flowers will show to their best advantage in the setting and tall flowers will not screen shorter ones. Knowing the time of flowering helps in locating these flowers so that they will flower in sequence with other plants about them.

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## Culture

Amaryllis blossoms range in color from pure white through various shades of pink to deep red. They are intolerant of frost and do not do well in cool soil. Because of this, it is customary to pot the bulbs and grow them inside at a constant 65 degrees F, moving the pot outside in June, and taking it inside in the fall where it is stored in a dry condition until spring when it is again started indoors.

**Caladiums** (*Caladita*) are grown for their showy foliage which ranges from white to red with many beautiful leaf patterns in the tradition of coleus. They do best in shady or semi-shaded areas which are well supplied with humus and moisture. After frost, dig the bulbs and store in a cool place to re-plant in the spring.

**Callas** are available in colors ranging from white to yellow to pink. The flowers consist of a center spike (spathe) with a single petal (spadix) which is cut low on one side and is a characteristic feature of the species. They produce from roots planted in the spring and should be handled similarly to tuberous begonias.

**Cannas** range in color from ivory and yellow through rose and salmon to crimson and scarlet. The foliage is either green or bronze. Plant the roots 6 inches deep and 18 inches apart in late spring. After frost kills the foliage, dig and store the roots over winter much the same as dahlias.

**Dahlias** come in nearly every color except blue. The typical dahlia reaches a height of 6 feet and requires support, usually provided by a stake driven 12 inches into the ground and 6 inches behind the root at the time of planting. Dahlias do not tolerate frost and should not be planted if there is a chance that the shoots will frost.

The size of individual flowers may increase by removing the buds from the lateral branches; however, this practice decreases the overall showiness of the planting. After the stalks are killed by frost, remove them, leaving a 6-inch stub. The roots

should remain in the ground for two weeks to thoroughly ripen before being dug. Dig carefully so the roots do not break away from the clump, which results in blind roots. (A blind root has no eye and therefore cannot produce a shoot.) Dry the roots enough to shake the soil from them, then pack in sawdust, perlite or vermiculite and store in a cool, dry place until spring.

Gladiolus are available in nearly every color. Plant the corms 3 inches deep and 6 inches apart in the spring after danger of freezing the shoots has passed. During the growing season, the original corm withers and a new one forms on top of it. The cutting of flowers does not inhibit the development of the new corm so long as leaves are not removed with the flower.

On the other hand, when seed is produced it is done at the expense of corm production. As soon as the tops die down, dig the corms. Remove the withered corms and tops and store the new corms in a frost-free location over winter. Avoid high temperatures and low humidity.

Lilies are available in several types and in colors ranging from white and yellow to deep red. While lilies are perennial, not all of them endure Colorado winters. If unsure of the hardiness of a particular lily, dig a portion of the plants, pack the bulbs (roots or rhizomes) in sawdust, vermiculite or perlite, and store in a frost-free location during the winter. They may be replanted in the spring. The plants remaining in the garden should be mulched to help them through the winter. The general rule is to plant the bulb (storage organ) to a depth of three times its height.

Tuberous begonias are found in colors ranging from white through yellow and orange to deep red. Their flowers are primarily double. Plant the roots, which may be 1-1/2 inches in diameter, 4 inches deep in a semi-shaded area. They do best in a soil with a high organic matter content that is kept relatively moist. After frost, dig the root, pack in sawdust and store under cool but frost-free conditions for replanting in the spring.

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