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Ells, James E./Flowers from spring-plant

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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, consideration should be given to exposure, soil type, color and height of flowers and time of flowering.

These bulbs, corms or roots must be dug in the fall and placed in frost-free storage if they are to be alive in spring.

These plants represent a relatively large investment and should be cultured with care.

Site Selection

In locating a flower bed for spring-planted bulbs, consideration should be given to exposure, soil type, color and height of flowers and time of flowering. Deciduous trees which produce very 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.

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

**Flowers from
spring-planted bulbs,
corms and roots**James E. Ells and James R. Feucht^{1/}

no. 7.411

buyers handling this material there is chance for mix-ups. Only the largest and firmest specimens should be selected from bins.

Soil Preparation

If the soil has produced well the previous year, its productivity may be maintained by applying one pound (.5 kilogram) of nitrogen and two pounds (.9 kg) of phosphoric acid or 20 pounds (9.1 kgs) of 5-10-5 analysis fertilizer per 1,000 square feet (90 square meters).

Where compost is available, a one-inch (2.5-centimeter) dressing over the ground prior to spading or rototilling is desirable. Ten bushels (.4 cubic meter) of well-rotted manure per 1,000 square feet (90 square meters) may be applied, but fresh manure should be composted for a year or more before applying to the flower bed.

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°F (18.3°C), 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 (*Caladia*) 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, the bulbs should be dug and stored in a cool place for replanting 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 are produced from roots planted in the spring and should be handled similarly to tuberous begonias.

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Cannas range in color from ivory and yellow through rose and salmon to crimson and scarlet. The foliage is either green or bronze. The roots should be planted six inches (15.2 cm) deep and 18 inches (45.7 cm) apart in late spring. After the foliage has frosted, the roots may be dug and stored over winter much the same as dahlias.

Dahlias come in nearly every color except blue. The typical dahlia will obtain a height of six feet (1.8 meters) and will require support which is usually provided by a stake driven 18 inches (45.7 cm) into the ground and six inches (15.2 cm) 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 be frosted.

The size of individual flowers may be increased by removing the buds from the lateral branches; however, this practice decreases the overall showiness of the planting. After the stalks have been killed by frost, they should be removed, leaving a six-inch (15.2-cm) stub. The roots should remain in the ground for two weeks to thoroughly ripen before being dug. The digging should be done carefully so that the roots are not broken away from the clump, as this results in blind roots. (A blind root has no eye and therefore cannot produce a shoot.) The roots should be dried enough to shake the soil from them, then packed in sawdust, perlite or vermiculite and stored in a cool, dry place until spring.

Gladiolus are available in nearly every color. The corm should be planted three inches (7.6 cm) deep and six inches (15.2 cm) apart in the spring after danger of freezing the shoots has past. 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, the corms may be dug, the withered corms and tops removed and the new corms stored in a frost-free location over winter. High temperatures and low humidity should be avoided.

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 will endure Colorado winters. If unsure of the hardiness of a particular lily, a portion of the plants should be dug and the bulbs (roots or rhizomes) packed in sawdust, vermiculite or perlite and stored 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. The roots, which may be 1½ inches (3.8 cm) in diameter, should be planted 4 inches (10.2 cm) deep in a semi-shaded area. They do best in a soil having a high organic matter content which is kept relatively moist. After frost, the root may be dug, packed in sawdust and stored under cool, but frost-free, conditions for replanting in the spring.

Reference

Seymour, E.L.D., *The Wise Garden Encyclopedia*, Wm. H. Wise & Co., Inc., New York, 1963.