



Free Guide to Planting Your Bulbs

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Bulb Box: Daffodil Double Mixed



Welcome to my free bulb planting guide, designed to accompany my exclusive collections of spring bulbs for John Lewis.

I have hand-picked these bulb collections specially to help you achieve designer flower show-style results in your own garden.

It removes the hassle of mixing and matching individual bulbs by choosing the best varieties and combinations for a great display of spring colour.

These stunning bulbs will bring panache, elegance and class to your garden – all from the same packet. And they will flower together for a magnificent effect.

I hope you enjoy growing them as much as I do!



Guide Contents

In this guide is my step-by-step advice on planting all the bulbs in this collection, as well as top tips to create stunning displays and make the most of your bulbs.

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Introduction to bulbs

Spring bulbs bring a welcome splash of colour early in the year when very few other plants are in flower.

They are incredibly versatile plants – they look great in the border to fill in gaps around other flowers and shrubs, or even growing up through your lawn in spring. They are also excellent in containers for indoors or outdoors.

Gardeners love bulbs because they are incredibly easy to grow – hardly anything can go wrong with them. Plant them too deep, too shallow or even upside down and they will still flower.

They are also a great investment. If cared for properly, they will spread and give you more plants and more flowers every year.

What exactly are bulbs?

A bulb is created when a plant sends its energy and nutrients below ground at the end of the growing season, like charging a battery. It stores all of this in the bulb over winter when the plant is dormant.

The following year, the energy in the bulb is ready and waiting to 'power' the flowers in spring. Once the flowering has finished, the plant uses its leaves to photosynthesise and make more energy to 'charge' the battery for next year.



Bulb Collection Crate:
Take A Stroll



Bulb Collection
Crate: White
Passion

Because of this 'recharging' process, you should not remove any wilting or yellowing plant leaves. They are busy sending their nutrients back into the bulb for next year.

Wait until all the leaves have gone brown before cutting back the foliage. Removing leaves early may prevent the bulb from flowering next year.

This means that the quality of its new growth and flowering is already determined in the bulb. You should try to buy the biggest, healthiest-looking bulbs possible.

We choose only large, high-quality bulbs that are ready to produce strong flower displays.

The bulbs in my collection

Alliums



Bulb Box: Allium Collection

Alliums are often called flowering onions and have very tall stems with a lollipop-shaped flower head on top. They are usually pink or purple but do come in white too. Some varieties have dense flower heads while others are more open, making them appear like fireworks. Alliums are great for border height.

Amaryllis



Amaryllis
Wonderland

These are tender bulbs from Brazil that are best grown indoors in the UK. They have long, tall stems that produce several large trumpet-shaped flowers at the top. Amaryllis flowers come in red and white, often with striped and patterned leaves and look stunning in any room.

Daffodils



Bulb Box: Daffodil Collection

One of the most iconic bulbs, the daffodil marks the start of spring and the return of life to the garden. They have star-shaped flowers with a central trumpet that can be double and ruffled. They usually come in yellow but some varieties have white, gold and orange shades.

Hyacinths



Bulb Box:
Velvety Violets

These are very popular bulbs thanks to their sweet scent and strong bottlebrush flower spires. Hyacinths are usually pink, purple or white and have masses of delicate flowers along a central stem. They are great for structure because the plants grow upright but not too tall.

Muscari



Bulb Box: Border Buddies

These are sometimes called grape hyacinths. They are short, upright plants with slender stems and short flower spires. The round, purple petals look like an upside-down bunch of grapes and come in blue or white shades. They also have slender, strappy foliage and are great for ground cover.

Tulips



Bulb Box:
Tulip Collection

Tulips are elegant plants that have tall, upright stems and fluted, cup-shaped flowers. They are great for adding height and also perfect for cutting and bringing indoors to display. Tulips come in a huge range of colours, particularly jewel tones, and also in crisp white.

Bulb planting tips

When to plant bulbs

All of the bulbs in my collection are varieties that flower in spring. They should be planted in autumn and winter, from late August to early December.

This gives the roots time to get established. The bulbs then feel the cold over winter, and flower when it warms up in spring.

Without this cold period, the bulbs would remain dormant, which is why they need planting the year before they flower.

Where to plant bulbs

Bulbs are very versatile plants and will work in borders or containers. My bulb collections have been cleverly designed to create perfect combinations so you can just plant and grow.

The collections look great in borders because they combine heights and flower colour and style for a striking display. Bulbs give you great garden colour when little else is blooming. Make sure to plant them in a spot that's visible from inside the house.

My bulb collections also work well in pots and containers for bold spring colour. Create a stunning container garden with a variety of pots in different sizes and heights. They can be arranged by the house to greet you when you arrive home. Or put them around the patio so you can see them from inside the house.



Bulb Box: Daffodil Collection

Harmony or contrast?

Create colour harmony by using similar shades and shapes.

Add dramatic contrast with different varieties and colours.



Bulb Box: Perfect Match



Bulb Box: Border Buddies

How to plant bulbs

General bulb planting advice

Bulbs are not that fussy but they will flower better if you give them the right conditions. Choose a sunny spot with well-drained soil – the only thing bulbs can't stand is excess water. It causes them to rot. They will grow fine in partial sun.

Most bulbs like to be planted two to three times as deep as they are tall. Line the base of your planting hole with a layer of grit or sand if your garden on heavy soil.

Check that you have the bulb the right way up before planting. The pointy end should face up unless otherwise stated on the packaging. If in doubt, plant sideways!



Planting bulbs in pots

Choose a deep pot: there should be enough space to plant bulbs deeply and have room for the roots to grow.

Make sure to add crocks to the bottom of the pot to aid drainage. Create a free-draining soil mix of two parts general purpose compost to one part horticultural grit. Then plant bulbs in pots using the same method you would in the ground.

Keep containers up on pot feet over winter to reduce waterlogging. You can also put them in a quiet spot in the garden and bring them back to the fore in spring.

How to naturalise bulbs

You can also 'naturalise' bulbs by planting them under your lawn – daffodils look gorgeous like this. Simply use a strong trowel to dig out the grass, plant the bulbs as normal and replace the turf over the top.

Make sure to plant them in a natural style rather than in straight lines with even spacing. Try simply tossing them around the area you want to plant and burying them where they fall. Or create a spiral outwards from a central feature like a tree.

Do not mow the lawn next spring until all the leaves have gone brown, or you will prevent the bulbs from recharging.



My top tip!

Planting a flower bulb is the same as installing a light bulb – simply 'push and twist'. Pushing and twisting the bulb is snug against the base of the soil and stops water rotting its base. This technique also provides a firm anchor for the bulb and helps roots go straight into the compost. If you simply place the bulb on the surface you could leave a gap for rainwater to collect, which may rot the bulb.

Bulb Box: Spring Emotions

How to plant bulbs

How to plant tulips

For best results, tulips should be planted slightly differently than the other bulbs. They need to be deeper, up to three times the height of the bulb. This gives the long stems extra support. They also go in the ground later if you can – October to November rather than September. They are late plants to send out roots, and the cooler temperatures protect them from soil diseases that may affect the bulbs.

Create layers of dense bulbs with our collections by planting in layers. Space the bulbs wider apart than usual, roughly 2-3cm. Put the tallest bulbs on the bottom, cover with a layer of compost and plant the next variety over the top between the gaps.

Some people recommend digging up tulip bulbs in summer to store them, before replanting again in early winter. However, I find that leaving them in the ground makes no difference as long as they are planted deep. Cover with a 5cm layer of mulch like leaf mould in summer.



Bulb Box:
Ruffled Rainbows

How to plant a lasagne pot

One of the most popular ways to plant bulbs in a container is to use layers to build a 'lasagne'. It involves planting the bulbs on top of one another to create a dense display and a mixture of heights and flowering times. It works with a range of varieties of one bulb, such a tulip collection, or a mixture of bulb types, with tulips on the bottom and muscari or narcissus on top.

Start with gravel at the bottom of the pot, then add general purpose compost in a layer at least 5cm deep. Plant a layer of the tallest, latest flowering bulbs like tulips, spaced slightly further apart than usual.

Cover those with a layer of compost so you can just see the bulb tips, then add another layer of bulbs in the spaces between the bottom ones. If you have room for a third layer, repeat as before. Make sure you have plenty of room for a thick layer of compost on top so the bulbs are buried nice and deep. Water in.



Bulb Box:
Tutti Frutti

Grow bulbs indoors

How to grow amaryllis

Note that amaryllis bulbs are planted differently to garden bulbs because they grow indoors.

My kit comes with its own ceramic pot, so you can get started right away. Plant the bulb with its pointed end upwards, leaving a third exposed above the compost. Keep in a bright spot at room temperature and water sparingly until the leaves start to develop.

Then begin watering more generously, avoiding the tip of the bulb in favour of keeping compost moist. Turn the pot occasionally to ensure straight, even growth and your amaryllis should flower in around eight weeks. To prolong flowering, move to a cooler position after flowers appear – approx. 15-18°C (60-65°F) – and remove dying blooms as they fade.

To make amaryllis flower again next year, cut back the spent flower stem to an inch above the top of the bulb. Keep watering and feeding the plant with a houseplant fertiliser until late summer.

Stop watering and cut the leaves back to 6cm from the top of the bulb when they turn yellow. Let the pot dry out completely and store it in a cool, dark, dry spot for at least 8 weeks. This could be a garage, cellar or dark corner of the shed.

Eight weeks before you want the bulb to flower again, repot it into fresh compost, bring back to the light and resume watering.



Amaryllis Red Lion

How to force bulbs

Some of these bulbs can be forced to flower early. This involves manipulating their conditions to make them flower in winter rather than spring. It is often used with hyacinths and amaryllis to get flowers in time for Christmas.

To do this, you need to artificially create a cold period of dormancy, before bringing the bulbs into the house for warmth.

Plant the bulbs in pots following the guidelines above, and place the bulbs in a cool, dark place. This needs to be somewhere that will mimic natural winter conditions. A garage, cellar or dark shed is ideal. Keep the bulbs like this with moist compost until they start to grow.

Once the bulbs have sprouted to an inch high, bring them indoors to a bright spot at room temperature and water as usually required for the bulb. Hyacinths should flower in five to six weeks, while amaryllis will take up to eight weeks.

Do not force the same bulb more than once every few years or it will become weak and stop flowering. Allow the bulb to return to a normal cycle.



Amaryllis Christmas Gift



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