

MESSENGER-INQUIRER

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Expand the Season of Flowers in the Landscape with Spring Flowering Bulbs
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Flowers blooming in late winter expand the possibility of having blooms in the landscape throughout the growing season. With the variety of spring flowering bulbs available, the bloom period may begin from late January through May. Those already in your garden can be divided and replanted as well.

The term “bulb” is a generic term that refers to a group of plants with different food storage structures to support life until the plant’s life cycle begins again. Botanists characterize these structures as bulb, corm, tuber, tuberous root, and rhizome.

Bulbs prefer to grow in well-drained soil, or they will rot. Most grow best in a sunny location. Many bulbs are planted at a depth of two to three times the diameter of the bulb. In addition, the best show of color results when several of the same types are planted in groups of odd numbers. Plant the earliest flowering bulbs in an area passed by every day or where they are visible from a window inside the house to enjoy them.

Snow crocus, *Crocus chrysanthus*, starts the blooming period in late January to early February. Blossoms are small and reach a height of 3 to 4 inches tall. Flower colors range from

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white, purple, light blue, and yellow to flowers with two colors such as yellow and violet or purple and white. The leaves are grass-like. Snow crocus peeking through a blanket of late winter snow is a delightful sight.

Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, has a little white, bell-shaped flower gracefully hanging down from each flower stem in February. Leaves are linear or strap-shaped. Plant height reaches up to 3 inches.

Netted iris, *Iris reticulata*, has a single violet-blue flower 3 to 5 inches above the ground. The foliage is grass-like and very fine. This unusual, small iris blooms in late winter. Netted iris is a good choice for rock gardens.

Greek windflower, *Anemone blanda*, has a small, daisy-like flower. Depending on the cultivar, the flower color is white, pink, or blue. This plant forms a small mound covered with flowers reaching 4 to 6 inches tall. The food storage structure for the Greek windflower is a rhizome. Plant the rhizome right away to prevent it from drying out and decreasing bloom.

Along with the small bulbs, plant daffodils (*Narcissus*). Another common name is jonquil. To help clarify the confusion, daffodil and *Narcissus* refer to the same group of bulbs. *Narcissus* is the scientific name and daffodil is the common name. Jonquil is a specific group of *Narcissus*. Jonquils generally have yellow, fragrant flowers that are produced in a cluster.

By selecting an assortment of the wide varieties of daffodils available, the blooming period can last from late February to early May. They make a brilliant show year after year. Daffodils take little care. They need to be divided after the bulbs become crowded and begin to produce fewer flowers in a few years. Remember that the flowers open toward sunlight. If you forget, you may only see the back of the flower. A few cultivars are mentioned below.

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‘February Gold’ is a yellow daffodil, is one of the first to bloom in late winter and reaches 10 inches tall.

‘Tete-a-Tete’ is a small daffodil with a height of 6 to 8 inches tall. The flowers are considered a soft yellow with slightly reflexed petals. One to three flowers appear per stem in April. ‘Tete-a-Tete’ is suitable for rock gardens.

‘Minnow’ has small flowers in mid-spring with white petals and a yellow cup. Several flowers are produced on stems that reach 7 inches tall.

‘Ice Follies’ has white petals and a short, broad cup, which is light lemon-yellow in color as it opens and then slowly changes to white. The blossoms are 2.5 to 3 inches across. The height of the plant ranges from 14 to 16 inches tall. ‘Ice Follies’ bloom in mid-spring.

‘Fortissimo’ has a large flower about 5 inches across in mid-spring. The flower has a deep orange cup and yellow petals. The height of ‘Fortissimo’ ranges from 18 to 20 inches tall.

‘Thalia’ produces 2 to 3 small white flowers per stem that open in April to May. The flowers reach 14 inches tall.

‘Cheerfulness’ has 1.5 to 2 inch double white flowers with yellow flecks near the center of the blossom. They appear in groups of 3 or 4 blossoms per stem in April to May. The plant reaches about 14 inches in height. Flowers are fragrant.

Another popular spring flowering plant is the tulip. In this area, tulips, *Tulipa* hybrids, are best treated as annuals. They are available in many colors from yellow to purple. The flower stem may reach 16 to 28 inches tall, depending on the hybrid. Cultivars with one flower or multiple blossoms per stem are available.

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The Greigii tulip, *Tulipa greigii*, is a species that performs better than hybrids. Different cultivars reach 8 to 18 inches tall and flower in mid to late March. The variegated red and green foliage of Greigii tulips also adds to the landscape.

For more information about spring flowering bulbs, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service Office at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tip:

Tulips do not perform well here because the soil temperature increases too quickly in late spring which causes the bulb to deteriorate. They are beautiful the first year but decrease in flower size and emerge sporadically in the second year.

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