

In the Back Yard

Digging Deep -Thanksgiving is Every Day

By Cynthia Brian



Begonias

Photos Cynthia Brian

"The more gratitude you show in life, the more you will have to be grateful for."

Cynthia Brian

Lamorinda is an area of great abundance, yet in these times of economic chaos we find ourselves complaining about the lack in our lives. Being human means that all of us, regardless of race, religion, economics, politics, or sex, will have difficult times and challenges to overcome. Because I'm a gardener, I find grace and gratitude in the dirt. My creative plan makes Thanksgiving every day, not just once a year. And of course, I encourage you to find happiness in nature as well.

Here's my plan. With our world in a state of despair, let's offer some humor, hope, and healing by planting bulbs for the brave! By planting bulbs now, we'll be putting the bloom on the gloom when the wicked weather of February and March roll around. After a long gray winter, you'll be glad that your gratitude for the bounty of the year had you donning your gardening gloves and trowel now.

Top Bulbs for Fall Planting:

Enrich your garden with the beauty and radiance of spring flowering bulbs that you plant in fall. The brightly colored flowers greet you each spring—a welcome sight after a long, gray winter. Most gardening experts agree that fall is the best time to plant spring flowering bulbs.

Here are some of my favorite bulbs:

1. Daffodil: These versatile bulbs are hardy in cold and warm climates. You don't even need a garden...daffodils grow great in pots and make excellent cut flowers.
2. Tulip: Treat yourself to a garden filled with tulips. They come in an array of colors, shapes, and sizes.

Group colors together for more impact. Tulips are also great in containers and work wonderfully intertwined with other annuals and perennials. Bulbs need to be chilled for four to six weeks prior to planting outdoors.

3. Freesia: These are magnificently scented bulbs arriving in a rainbow of colors. Their floppy flower stalks add to their charm. Deep water every 4 days.

4. Ranunculus: Cottage style garden flowers that have peony-like blooms are gorgeous in any planting situation. They need plenty of sun. You can extend the bloom time by deadheading the spent flowers.

5. Hyacinth: Dutch hyacinth smell as delicious as they look. These charming flowers appear delicate, but they are tough, surviving in a variety of conditions. Plant in sun or filtered shade.

6. Grape Hyacinth: These tiny hardy gems naturalize and look best planted in mass or used for edging.

7. Iris: Dutch irises make terrific cut flowers. They come in blue, purple, white, yellow, and mauve. They have a long blooming season, and need much as frost protection.

8. Anemone: These are colorful tubers, and come either as singles or doubles with a contrasting center color. They prefer cooler conditions in light shade and also like to be mulched.

9. Crocus: Winter is nearing its end when you see these mighty blooms push through the ground to reveal their beauty. Only a few inches high, they are perfect compliments to container gardens with the other bulbs. Crocus arrive in a variety of rich colors including blues, violets, yellows and whites and are usually the first to show off their charm in Lamorinda gardens.

10. Allium: A member of the onion family, most allium bloom in late spring or early summer with spherical blossoms that are striking and hardy.

11. Lily: Planted now, lilies offer large fragrant blooms on tall stalks in late spring or summer.

Naturalizing bulbs, which bloom year after year and spread throughout your landscape, benefit from a bulb fertilizing at planting time. Non-naturalizing bulbs are not as picky. Many gardeners plant their bulbs while adding blood or bone meal to the soil, however, I have found that this only attracts our masked faced friends—the raccoons. When I first moved to this area I always added meal while planting bulbs only to wake up the following morning to a scene of "keep your eye on the bulb" as all my hard work lay atop the ground!

Bulb Planting Technique

"It's not that I'm so smart, it's just that I stay with problems longer."

Albert Einstein-1879-1955, Physicist

Planting bulbs is not rocket science, but it does take time and patience! Every year I plant hundreds, sometimes thousands of bulbs, always feeling like Einstein because I hung in there, despite our challenging clay! Patience is a virtue. There are many tools that make planting bulbs a bit easier. Whatever works for you is the best tool to use. Trowels are great if your soil is not too compacted and you can dig to the required depth. Many trowels actually are marked with inches. Augers are powered by a drill and are great in our hard clay soil. They easily penetrate untilled dirt and are super to maneuver in a mature garden where plants are crowded. Bulb planters take the strain out of planting bulbs. There are foot planters for hard soil and hand planters for looser soil. Over the years I have purchased and tried them all. I must admit, I am back to my handy hard working trowel. With my constant supply of chicken manure and compost pile scraps, the dirt is slowly becoming rich and fertile. Whichever tool you decide to use, till the soil a bit to loosen it. Even if you are a beginning gardener, planting a bouquet of bulbs will make you shine like a real pro, lift your spirits, and help you believe that all is well in the world! Voila! Blossoms for the brave.



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CYNTHIA'S DIGGING DEEP GARDENING GUIDE FOR NOVEMBER

"Reflect upon your present blessings, of which every man has plenty; not on your past misfortunes, of which all men have some." Charles Dickens, 1812-1870, Novelist

Thanksgiving is nigh. Pumpkins and scarecrows decorate our yards. An old wheelbarrow filled with an assortment of bright begonias brightens a barren corner. We give thanks for the bounty of our beautiful gardens, our wide-open spaces, community camaraderie, and the benevolence of family and friends. As we celebrate November, we must still prepare for the dormant season ahead.



- CLEAN UP any leaves or weeds left over from summer annuals and vegetables. Put all your debris into a compost pile. Cleaning up now will prevent the population of snails, earwigs, and sow bugs from expanding.
- FERTILIZE your annuals and vegetables with fertilizers high in nitrogen. Lawns need their second application now. Water well.
- PLANT ground covers, trees with fall color, and shrubs. Nurseries boast a wide variety of perennials such as columbine, carnations, coral bells, and chrysanthemums which can be planted from six packs.
- BULBS are usually ready to be planted now. Chill tulips and hyacinths for 4-6 weeks before planting.
- DEADHEAD your roses regularly to maintain blossoms and fragrance until January. If you prefer, allow the rose hips to grace your bushes with their vibrant colors and vitamin C for your tea.
- SEEDS for hardy annuals such as sweet alyssum, bachelor button, and forget-me-not's can be sown now.
- DIVIDE perennials and separate overgrown clumps. Plant elsewhere or share with a friend.
- SOW garlic and onion bulbs now for those great dinners you are planning to cook! There must be a bit of the Mediterranean culture in all of us!
- COLLECT dried grasses, pods, willows, branches, and other natural materials for a cornucopia of autumn arrangements.
- CREATE glorious fall hued floral arrangements with the firecracker colors of roses, gerbera, berries, and reeds.
- VEGETABLES such as broccoli, beets, carrots, lettuce, peas, turnips, and spinach can be planted by seed.
- HARVEST your pumpkins, squash, apples, walnuts, and tangerines. Make sure to save some for holiday décor.
- ENJOY the fall foliage! Persimmons, pomegranates, and guava trees are now showcasing their precious fruits. Savor the colors in anticipation for the juiciness to come next month.
- BE grateful for your garden- large, small, or the potted plant in the window, everyone is enriched by nature. Take time to give thanks for the little things every day, not just once a year. Be grateful for what you have. Having an attitude of gratitude makes every moment shine brightly.

Everyday is Thanksgiving Day when you live, learn, laugh, and love in the moment. Thanksgiving is today. Share the abundance. Wishing everyone a very happy, healthy, and delicious Turkey Day!

May the sun shine in your garden and the stars in your heart!

Happy Gardening to you



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