

FALL FLOWERS



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Master Gardener

QUESTION: I want to plant some bulbs this fall. What could you recommend that might be different than the regular tulips and daffodils?

ANSWER: Even though as I write this I am hiding inside due to smoke and hot temperatures, it is almost getting to the time of year to be thinking about planting bulbs for spring color. In our area, the ideal time for planting is mid-October through November – after the fall rains have softened up the soil a little (but not made it soggy) and before we have any real freezing temperatures.

However, if you want a good selection, you should buy them now so you will be ready when the conditions are right for planting.

The variety of spring flowering bulbs is tremendous: daffodils, tulips, hyacinths, alliums, lilies and many, many more. There is no reason to stick to just the old tried and true – branch out a little! I will be talking about two varieties that I have grown that you might consider adding to your garden.

When I was working full time, every spring I would take vases of my snowflake flowers to our reception area. Honestly, I think our receptionist got tired of everyone asking her,



PHOTOS COURTESY OF JANET BITTER

Species tulips are typically smaller than the standard types you are used to seeing, but they are unusual and very early in their bloom. Their blooms come in many colors and shapes. Many varieties have more than one bloom per stem.

“What are those flowers? Are they snowdrops?” She finally made a sign with their name so she wouldn’t forget when she was asked.

There are two types of snowflakes – *Leucojum vernum*, or spring snowflake, and *Leucojum aestivum*, or summer snowflake. Spring snowflake blooms slightly earlier than the summer variety, and is a smaller plant, usually about 12 inches tall. *L. aestivum* can be 2½ feet tall. Both like full to part sun and well-drained soil. They look better planted in clumps, rather than singular plants.

One thing I really like about these plants is their ability to naturalize – mine were here when I moved to this house and they are still going strong over 20 years later. They make nice cut flowers and are supposedly rodent and deer resistant (I can’t testify

to this as mine are in a fenced garden area – however, gophers have never bothered mine either).

Snowflake flowers are bell shaped and have a small green dot at the end of their six petals (for the record, snowdrops only have three dots and the shape of the flower isn’t as bell-like). The only pests you might have issues with are slugs and snails. If you do, be sure and use a bait marked safe for children, pets and wildlife – this is readily available in our local stores.

The other bulb I would like to call to your attention is a type of tulip. I did try and grow regular hybrid tulips in my yard several times over the years, but I have now realized that I might as well call them what they are: deer popsicles. Yes, the deer really like tulip flowers – they wait

until you are excited to see your first blooms and then one night they have a popsicle party.

However, I noticed that one type of tulip, a species tulip, seemed to be safe from the deer. Species tulips are typically smaller than the standard types you are used to seeing, but they are unusual and very early in their bloom. Their blooms come in many colors and shapes. Many varieties have more than one bloom per stem. Plant them along a front walkway or somewhere similar to admire their petite beauty.

The other advantage to species tulips is that they reliably come back year after year, unlike their hybridized cousins who put on a spectacular show for maybe a year or two and then fizzle out.

Species tulips need a very well-drained soil. They prefer a little sand or rock mixed into the soil. Plant them 5-8 inches deep in full sun. If you want them to naturalize, do not dead-head the flowers. For some reason the deer have never bothered mine. I’m not sure if it’s because of their diminutive size making them harder to find, or, like some literature I have read, they are truly more deer and rodent resistant.

Spend some time researching some of the more unusual spring flowering bulbs we can grow here and add some variety to your spring landscape!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 S E Douglas Ave., Roseburg. Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.



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