

OCTOBER 2018

House Beautiful

New season, new mood

Fall in love with autumn's rich colours

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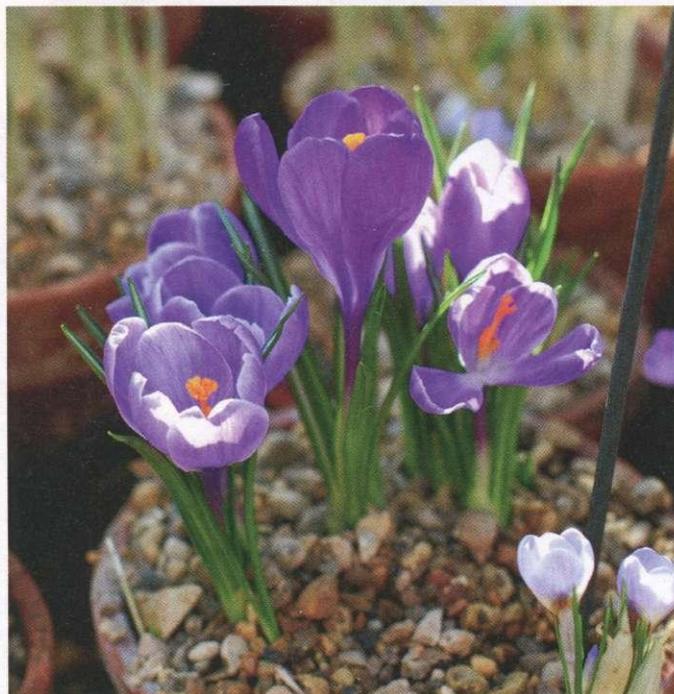
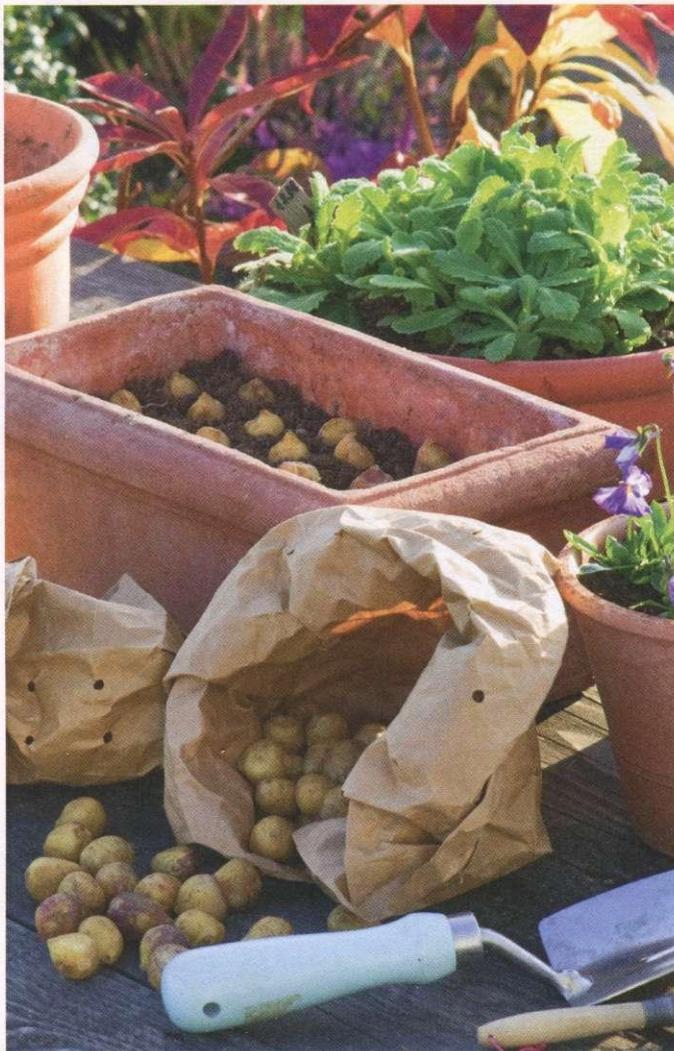
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The colder weather is upon us, the leaves in the trees are turning and the air is filled with the smell of bonfires. But, although summer is over, there is still plenty to be done in the garden in October. It's the perfect time to get bulbs in the ground, ready for a glorious display of winter and spring colour. Yet many

of us are a little daunted by the thought of planting bulbs: Where should they go? How deep do you plant them? How many do you put in? And, crucially for novices, which way up do they go?

'Bulbs are actually quite easy to deal with,' says award-winning garden designer Jo Thompson. 'Of course, it's helpful if you put them in the right way up, but even if you do put them in upside down, they usually find their way up to the surface. It's worth getting some planted this month because they create the most dazzling displays. And if you've already got bulbs in, it makes sense to refresh them by adding more because you can never be certain you'll get the same colour year after year.'

Perfect timing

For spring flowering, most bulbs and corms (smaller bulbs, such as crocuses and cyclamen) can be planted throughout October, but leave tulips until the end of the month to avoid problems with the tulip fire virus. 'The trick is to get them in the ground before any risk of frost, so that they can start producing roots,' says garden designer and BBC *Gardeners' World* presenter Mark Lane. 'Once rooted, they're quite frost tolerant.'

Use a bulb catalogue or search online and choose varieties that come into flower at different times, so you have a never-ending display of colour throughout spring.

Select your spot

It can be difficult deciding where to plant bulbs. One option is to go natural. Simply throw a group of bulbs over an area of garden and plant them where they land. Obviously, you don't want to mow over the leaves, as they need to die back so the bulbs get the energy they need to flower again next year. So put them in an area that you don't mind not mowing for a while. Narcissus (daffodils) look great planted in this way – you get a very natural effect. If you have a shady, damp area, try using snake's head fritillaries as, unlike most bulbs, they're very happy in wet soil.

How to plant

Once you've bought your bulbs, you don't have to rush straight out to plant them. 'A bulb is a storage organ for a dormant plant, so they'll keep for several weeks,' says Mark Lane. 'Open the box or bags as soon as you have them, keep them away from direct sunlight and give them plenty of air flow. They need to be kept cool and dry, so a garage or shed is the ideal spot. However, if you miss a planting season most bulbs won't keep until the next season. The ▶

BULB BASICS

Left When planting in pots, make sure there are drainage holes or the bulbs will rot. Space the bulbs out evenly in the compost, with the pointy end facing upwards. Crocuses provide much-needed colour in early spring, but require full sun to look their best

SPRING CHEER

Opposite Tulips provide brilliant colour and shape, enhancing a seasonal display of other spring-flowering plants. Here, quince 'Vranja' has been underplanted with groups of vibrant red tulips and white iberis



exceptions are erythronium and *Anemone nemorosa* – these do dry out, so you need to plant them soon after purchase.'

'Look at the bulb and always plant with the pointy side up,' says Jo Thompson. 'Sometimes they do look the same both ways up, but usually you can see some shoots, even if they are a bit wispy. There should be instructions on the pack, but broadly speaking you need to plant the bulb to a depth of two to three times its length.'

'If you're planting in the ground, use a bulb planter,' says Mark Lane. 'It's a good idea to get a long-handled design, one with a tread edge will make things even easier – this will offer some protection against back strain. For small bulbs and corms, a hand trowel works very well, as does a hand bulb planter. Try the tools out to find which one feels best for you and works within your budget. When planting, add a layer of grit under each bulb to stop slugs attacking them and to improve drainage.'

Pot luck

Spring-flowering bulbs work brilliantly in containers, but make sure they have holes in the bottom for drainage because the bulbs will rot if the pot becomes waterlogged. Add a layer of grit and use a good-quality compost, such as John Innes No 2.

'For some corms, it is a little more difficult to work out a top and a bottom, but they will correct themselves, as long as they are not planted too deeply,' says Mark. 'As you plant bulbs two to three times the length of the bulb itself, this means large-flowering bulbs such as alliums need to be planted 20cm deep; for tulips 15cm deep; and 10cm deep for camassia. Small bulbs and corms only need to be planted at a depth of 5cm.'

'Layering bulbs in a "bulb lasagne" style works best,' he adds. 'This means planting the larger bulbs at the bottom and smaller bulbs and corms towards the top. This way you can have colour from January to March, with crocus and narcissus; April to May with narcissus and tulip; May for allium and camassia; liliium, gladioli and begonia for June through to August; nerine for September; and cyclamen for October through to December.'

'It would be difficult, unless you had a very large pot, to include all of these, but you could group several pots together containing a combination of these bulbs,' suggests Mark. In a container garden, mix in pots with flowers grown from seed to add variety and to ensure that even the smallest of spaces will always have a dazzling show. 'Bulbs are best planted in a sunny site; however, narcissus, scilla, *Anemone blanda* and martagon lilies do well in part shade,' explains Mark. 'This is why growing bulbs in pots works so well – you can move the pot around to the best position.'

'Don't pack too many bulbs into a pot, thinking more will reward you with better flowers,' he cautions. 'Plant at least twice the bulb's width apart and remember the flowers are sometimes much bigger than the bulb, so space your bulbs accordingly. Remember, too, to feed your bulbs in pots once a week with a liquid fertiliser.'

SUMMER SENSATIONS

Opposite Alliums provide a showstopping display early in the season with their spherical flowerheads, which can be left on after flowering to provide interest. Plant them in clusters in a border for maximum impact. Here, groups of *Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation'

and white *Allium nigrum* have been combined with different shaped flowers in a coordinating colour palette: white, blue and purple *Aquilegia vulgaris* and pinky-purple bearded iris. Easy to grow and inexpensive, the smaller varieties are also suitable for containers

TOP 5 BULBS...

...for planting now, as chosen by Mark Lane



Camassia leichtlinii subsp. *suksdorfii*

Loose spires up to 1.3m tall carry clusters of lilac star-shaped blooms. This meadow flower from North America is happiest in moist soil or partial shade.



Tulipa 'Rococo'

A stunning tulip for adding a touch of luxury and vibrancy to your flowerbeds or pots. It has oversized carmine-frilled petals edged with fire-engine red with a blue sheen. It's also great as a cut flower.



Allium unifolium

A pretty compact allium that is perfect for containers. It has slender grey leaves that die back before the open, bell-shaped pinkish-purple flowers emerge in early summer.



Eremurus robustus

For height, drama and movement, you cannot beat eremurus. This foxtail lily has a huge flower spike (up to 2.4m tall), which bears as many as 800 small flowers that are a pretty pale peach-pink colour.



Iris 'Alida' (*Reticulata*)

This dwarf iris, a native of Turkey and the Caucasus Mountains, has a gentle scent. Its soft, sky-blue flowers, with a yellow throat, will bring welcome colour to your garden from January to February.