HORTICULTURE COLUMN

BULBS

Our northern relatives plant bulbs in the fall for spring color. You can grow flowering bulbs too if you select the right type for Florida conditions.

Tulips, hyacinths and daffodils are a few popular bulbs that are not long lived in our Central Florida conditions. These cold weather favorites need winter chilling for good spring growth and spectacular blooms. They are susceptible to soil borne nematodes that limit blooms and growth. If you long for drifts of colorful bulbs like you had "back home", photos and memories may be the best you will get. Plant northern favorites in small areas for spots of color and replant with fresh bulbs each fall.

Florida’s mild winter weather is not good for all bulbs, but there are some Florida favorites you can add to your landscape for seasonal color. Some are low care and don’t need to be dug at the end of the season. Others have special requirements to keep them at their best. Here are a few easy care bulbs.

To create a splash of spring color, try amaryllis. Flowers of white and pink are held high above the leaves. Bright light is important for good flowering, but plants will bloom in partial shade.

Daylily flower colors range from pale yellow to gold, orange and dark burnt orange. Try several varieties for a sequence of color from spring through summer. Flower size and height above the foliage varies. These lilies are drought tolerant when not in bloom. Flowers only open for one day, but plants have multiple blooms for a series of color.

Gloriosa lily grows as a vine with orange and yellow flowers. Flowers are most prolific in full sun to partial shade.

The leaves of caladiums provide a colorful display in sunny or shady gardens from late spring through fall. Leaves are heart or strap shape in green, white, pink or red, sometimes with speckles and outlined veins. Use them in mass plantings of a single color for the most impact.

Blue flowers are hard to come by, so try Agapanthus or African lily with its ball of blooms on foot long stems.

Crinum lilies have white, pink or maroon and white striped flowers, sometimes called milk and wine lilies.

Cannas grow best in full sun. Choose from yellow, pink, orange and multicolor.

Some iris do not grow well here, but our native iris and Louisiana iris do. These are commonly sold in landscape nurseries in containers instead of as bulbs.

African iris produce white flowers held above the leaves like dancing butterflies. This iris grows in full sun and dry soil conditions and is often killed by root rot disease in wet soil.

Most bulbing plants produce a proliferation of young shoots from the base of the plant. Home gardeners divide clumps in the fall to increase plantings or share with friends.

Walking iris have an unusual growth habit. Plantlets form at the ends of the flower stalk which then bends to the ground, allowing this iris to spread. Plant them in partial sun. Flowers are similar to African iris.

For a more complete list of bulbs for Florida, call the Osceola County Extension Office at (321) 697-3000. Readers with internet access can search the University of Florida’s publications from our web site at http://osceola.ifas.ufl.edu. Go to the EDIS link and use the key word search for bulbs.
This is a busy weekend. Visit the Pioneer Center on Bass Road (near the Wal-Mart west of Kissimmee) today for a walk back in local history. In addition to the cracker house, school, smoke house and blacksmith shop, visit the museum and local craftsmen. Living historians portray times gone by and share stories of the past.

Volunteers are needed today for the countywide litter clean up project. Meet Bobby Jo Cromwell, Osceola County Lake Specialist, at the Kissimmee lakefront in the pine trees across from the city boat ramp.

Join me at the Greenways and Trails long range planning workshop at Forever Florida’s Cypress restaurant in Kenansville, about 7 miles south of highway 192 off highway 441. The open house is from 9 AM until noon. Stop in and tell us what types of trails you prefer and where you would like them. Call our office to find out about additional workshops scheduled in other parts of the county.

Brevard County hosts the Space coast Birding Festival this weekend and dedicates the first section of the Great Florida Birding Trail.

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