BULB PLANTING TIME IS HERE

Easy, enjoyable, intriguing, long lasting, these are just a few words that describe the joy of flowering bulbs. Bulbs are starting to come out in planting force right now and from January through May they will be out on flowering force. You might be questioning whether or not we can plant bulbs here in Havasu…the answer is YES! October, November and December are bulb planting months for us. Bulbs are simple to plant, low-maintenance, dependable and pest free (but not necessarily bunny free). But what we term a bulb is not necessarily a “true bulb”. Here is your horticulture lesson for the day.

A **true bulb** is composed of layers of fleshy leaves or scales that overlap each other like the layer of an onion. A complete flowering plant develops inside the bulb. (Such as grape hyacinth, Dutch iris, daffodils, tulips.)

A **corm** is a swollen underground stem that grows upright. (Such as gladiolus, crocus, freesia).

**Rhizomes**, also called rootstocks, are thickened stems that grow horizontally, weaving their way along or below the surface of the soil and at intervals sending stems above ground. (Such as calla, bearded iris).

A **tuber** is a swollen end of an underground root that has eyes or growing points. Each eye produces a separate plant. (Such as dahlias, ranunculus)
Tuberous roots are the only ones that are real roots; their food supply is kept in the root tissue, not in the stem or leaf tissue. (Such as daylily).

Okay, end of the horticulture lesson, lets get down to the fun part. When purchasing bulbs, look for plump firm bulbs and ones that are not sprouting. Their outer skins should be intact. Good soil drainage is the key to a successful bulb life. Rule of thumb is if you can’t dig in it, don’t expect a bulb to live in it. They like a loose sandy soil with organic matter in it. Do not use manure in the planting bed because of the risk of burning and subsequent rot where the bulbs come in contact with it. Bulbs require full sun. When planting bulbs follow the depth chart on the package and sprinkle a bulb food or booster (4-10-6) into the hole. Phosphate (the second number) is the important ingredient in successful bulbs. When planting bulbs place them in-groups for a more dramatic show. Water the bulbs well at planting time and keep the soil moist but not wet. Bulbs use little water until leaves have pushed through the soil. If the soil is too wet, the bulbs will become soggy and rot. Once the bulbs start poking their heads up the enjoyment starts. It seems as though you can literally watch them grow. There are bulbs that will come up every year and multiply and there are others that you will need to plant each time.

The favorites for growing here in Havasu are the bearded iris (which not only bloom every year but the leaves stay green all year long), Narcissus, Dutch iris, daffodils, freesia, gladiolus and ranunculus. Don’t forget that bulbs are very adaptable to containers both outside and indoor. Adequate drainage is important. Apply enough water to wet to the depth of the container and allow it to drain out. Let it dry sufficiently before the next watering.
Bulbs can also be grown in a water culture. Water alone is satisfactory for hyacinth, while paper white narcissus and daffodils do well in a pebble base. The key to water culture planting is to maintain water levels just above the base of the bulbs.

Here are some additional rules of thumb for bulbs:

- Tulips, hyacinths and crocus require refrigeration time of 3 to 4 weeks prior to planting.
- If leaving the bulbs in the ground do not cut off the foliage after flowering but allow it to dry naturally. This is important since the green leaves are producing food for the plants growth next year.

Bulb planting can be one of the most satisfying areas of gardening. And needless to say, a real eye catcher.
Circle your calendar for Meet the Master Gardeners Day/Citrus and Water Conservation Workshop on Nov. 3rd at the Library and sign up for the Urban Home Horticulture Course starting in February 2004.

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For more information, contact the Master Gardeners by calling their hotline at 505-4105. Home Garden Day is on the 1st Tuesday of every month at the Library from 11:00 – 1:00.

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