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Thursday, May 1, 2025



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How to Grow Tulip Flowers: The Complete Guide



Botanical Name:	<i>Tulipa</i> spp.
Plant Type:	Flower
Season:	Full Sun ,

FREE GUIDE!



sure:

Best Time to Plant Tulips: Spring

Flower Colors: Green, White, Multicolor, Orange, Pink, Purple, Red, White, Yellow

Hardiness Zones: 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8

Planting, Growing, and Caring for Tulips

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: March 5, 2025



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Long live the tulip! These beautiful jewels brighten our days in spring. We truly look forward to seeing those blue-green leaves start to emerge as the earth awakens from its winter sleep! Here are our tips on how to grow and care for tulips in your garden.

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About Tulips

Tulips typically begin emerging from the ground in late winter or early spring. If unseasonably mild weather causes premature growth in winter, the danger is not as great as it may seem. Tulips (and [daffodils](#), too) are quite cold-tolerant. If freezing winter temperatures return, it may delay growth, however. Snow is actually helpful in this case, as it can insulate

Plant in the Fall for Spring Blooms!

Tulip bulbs are planted in the autumn, 6 to 8 weeks before the ground freezes. You can have tulips blooming from early to late spring by planting varieties with different bloom times. Some types are suitable for forcing into bloom indoors, and most are excellent for use as cut flowers, too.

Tulip flowers are usually cup-shaped with three petals and three sepals. Every setting has a tulip, from small “species” tulips in naturalized woodland areas to larger tulips that fit formal garden plantings from beds to borders. The upright flowers may be single or double and vary in shape from simple cups, bowls, and goblets to more complex forms. Height ranges from 6 inches to 2 feet. One tulip grows on each stem, with two to six broad leaves per plant.

Are Tulips Annual or

Although tulips are technically perennial, many centuries of hybridizing means that the bulb's ability to return year after year has weakened. Therefore, many gardeners treat them as annuals, planting new bulbs every autumn. The North American climate and soil can't replicate the ancient Anatolian and southern Russian conditions of their birth. Gardeners in the western mountainous regions of the U.S. come closest to this climate and may have more success perennializing their tulips.

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PLANTING

Tulips prefer a site with full or afternoon sun. In Zones 7 and 8, choose a shady site or one with morning sun only, as tulips don't like a lot of heat.

The soil must be well-draining, neutral to slightly acidic, fertile, and dry or sandy. All tulips dislike areas with excessive moisture. Prepare the garden bed by using a garden fork or tiller to loosen the soil to a depth of 12 to 15 inches, then mix in a 2- to 4-inch layer of compost.

Tall varieties should be sheltered from strong winds.

When to Plant Tulips

- **Plant tulip bulbs in the fall**, 6 to 8 weeks before a hard, ground-freezing frost is expected. The bulbs need time to establish themselves

- A good rule of thumb is to plant bulbs when the average nighttime temperatures in your area are in the 40s.
- In colder northern climates, plant in September or October. In warmer climates, plant bulbs in December (or even later).
- To find the best dates, consult our [fall bulb planting chart](#).
- Nature never intended bulbs to loll about above ground, so don't delay planting the bulbs after purchase.
- In southern climates with mild winters, plant bulbs in late November or December. The bulbs will need to be chilled in the refrigerator for about 12 weeks before planting. (Bulb suppliers often offer pre-chilled bulbs for sale, too.)
- If you miss planting your bulbs at the optimal time, don't wait for spring or next fall. Bulbs aren't like seeds. Even if you find an unplanted sack of tulips or daffodils in January or February, plant them and take your chances. See more

- Plant bulbs fairly deep—8 inches deep, or about three times the height of the bulb. Dig a hole deeper than that in order to loosen the soil and allow for drainage. In clay soils, plant 3 to 6 inches deep instead.
- Space bulbs 4 to 6 inches apart.
- Set the bulb in the hole with the pointy end up. Cover with soil and press soil firmly.
- Water bulbs right after planting. Although they can't bear wet feet, bulbs need water to trigger growth.
- If you're planning to raise perennial tulips, feed them a balanced fertilizer when you plant them in the fall. Bulbs are their own complete storage system and contain all of the nutrients they need for one year. Use organic material, compost, or a balanced time-release bulb food.
- To deter mice and moles—if they have been a problem—put holly or any other thorny leaves in the planting holes. Some gardeners use kitty litter or crushed gravel. If ravenous voles and

-
- A close-up photograph of a field of bright yellow tulips. The tulips are in various stages of bloom, with some fully open and others just starting to unfurl. The petals are a vibrant yellow, and the green leaves are long and pointed. The background is dark and out of focus, making the tulips stand out prominently.

GROWING

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- Rainy summers, irrigation systems, and wet soil are death to tulips. Never deliberately water a bulb bed unless in a drought. Wet soil leads to fungus and disease and can rot bulbs. Add shredded pine bark, sand, or any other rough material to the soil to foster swift drainage.
- Apply compost annually to provide nutrients needed for future blooms.
- In the spring, when leaves emerge, feed your tulip the same bulb food or bone meal you used at planting time. Water well.
- Deadhead tulips as soon as they go by, but do not remove the leaves!
- Allow the leaves to remain on the plants for about 6 weeks after flowering. The tulips need their foliage to gather energy for next year's blooms! After the foliage turns yellow and dies back, it can be pruned off.
- Large varieties may need replanting every few years; small types usually multiply and spread on their own.



Types

Tulip flowers may be single, double, ruffled, fringed, or lily-shaped, depending on the variety.

- **‘Cracker’ tulip**: purple, pink, and lilac petals; midseason bloomer
- **‘Ile de France’**: red blooms on stems to 20 inches tall; midseason bloomer
- **‘Marilyn’**: large, ruffled, candy cane-color flower; late-season bloomer
- **‘Spring Green’**: creamy-white petals feathered with green; late-season bloomer
- **‘Renown’**: hot pink, egg-shape flower; late-season bloomer

Wild, or **“species,”** tulips are small in size, ranging in height from 3 to 8 inches. They are tougher than hybrids. Rock and herb

They look stunning when planted in large groupings.

- **For early to midspring bloom time:**
Tulipa bakeri, *T. batalinii*, *T. humilis*, *T. kaufmanniana*, *T. turkestanica*
- **For later blooming time:** *T. linifolia*, *T. neustreuvae*, *T. sprengeri*, *T. vvedenskyi*
- **For multicolor varieties:** *T. biflora*, *T. greigii* ‘Quebec’, *T. praestans* ‘Fusilier’ and ‘Unicum’, *T. tarda*, *T. turkestanica*
- **For a container:** *T. kaufmanniana* ‘Goudstuk’
- **For (mottled) foliage:** *T. greigii* (mottled or striped), *T. fosteriana* ‘Juan’, *T. kaufmanniana* ‘Heart’s Delight’
- **For fragrance:** *T. aucheriana*, *T. biflora*, *T. saxatilis*, *T. sylvestris*, *T. turkestanica*
- **For warmer regions:** Lady tulip (*T. clusiana*), Candia tulip (*T. saxatilis*), and Florentine tulip (*T. sylvestris*) overwinter in the South or mild-winter areas of the West (Zones 8 to 10) without the need of a chilling period

There are so many beautiful varieties of

HARVESTING

Cut tulips just before the buds fully open. Leave some of the foliage behind to build up energy in the bulb for the next year's growth. Recut the stems at an angle before placing them in a vase. Tulips continue to grow after being cut and are "phototropic," reaching toward the light. Rotate the vase daily to keep stems upright.

Change the water daily, and tulips will last about 7 days in a vase. To get a long vase life of at least a week, cut stems diagonally and wrap the upper two-thirds of stems (with flowers) in a newspaper funnel. Stand in cool water up to the funnel for 1 to 2 hours, recut stems, and set in fresh water.

GARDENING PRODUCTS



PESTS/DISEASES

- Gray mold
- Slugs and snails
- Aphids
- Nematodes
- Bulb rot
- Squirrels, rabbits, mice, and voles are especially fond of tulip bulbs.

WIT AND WISDOM

- Tulips, and the word for them, come from the Far East: “Tulip” comes from

back to the Persian word *dulband*, meaning “round.”

- Did you know: If you dig up a tulip bulb in late summer, it’s probably not the same bulb you planted last fall—it’s her daughter. Even while the tulip is blossoming, the bulb is dividing for the next generation.
- In 17th-century Holland, the new tulip was such the rage and fashion that a handful of bulbs was worth about \$44,000.
- Red tulips symbolize a declaration of love. Explore more [flower meanings here](#).

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



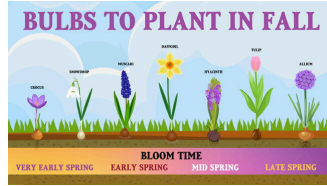
Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it’s not surprising that she and The Old Farmer’s Almanac found each other. She leads digital con-

in the state of Indiana. [Read More](#)
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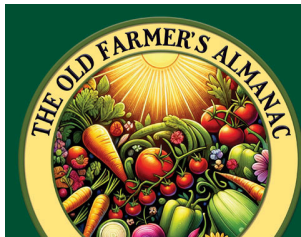
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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Judi Domingo (not verified) 11 months ago
Very informative article. After the tulips flowered, do you cut the stem? I see a seed like after the flower bloomed and fall.

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REPLY

The Editors 11 months ago
Hi Judi,

You want to deadhead your tulips after they have bloomed so your plants do not waste energy producing unwanted seed heads. You do not have to cut the entire stem off, but can cut it down to the first leaves, which will give it a cleaner appearance. Just remember not to remove the foliage until it has browned and died back naturally because even though the flowers have come and gone, the leaves are how your tulip bulbs store energy for next year's growing season.

REPLY

Mary Gordon (not verified) 1 year ago

I received a potted tulip for Easter, it has finished blooming, what do I do before planting in the garden?

REPLY

beginning gardener, please be specific with information.

REPLY

The Editors 1 year ago

Hi Mary,

Unfortunately potted tulips that are forced to bloom indoors don't have a high success rate when replanted outdoors. And if they do, it typically takes 2 or 3 years to rebloom.

With that being said, if you'd like to try to save your tulip bulb, cut off spent flowers and place your potted tulip in a sunny window and water regularly until the foliage naturally dies back. Tulips gather energy for next year's blooms through their leaves. Once the foliage has died back, dig up the bulb and store it in a cool, dark location until the fall when you can plant it in the garden.

[REPLY](#)

Ana Katona (not verified) 1 year 10 months ago

I grew tulips for the first time in my life this year. So I have about zero experience and I was a bit disappointed, when digging up my bulbs, seeing that those were not just divided or multiplied but their size were much smaller (about the third) to the ones I planted. What's the chance for these smaller new bulbs to bloom next year and what do I supposed to do to get them grow bigger? If it's possible at all...

[REPLY](#)

The Editors 1 year 10 months ago

Hi Ana,

Those smaller bulblets, also known as daughter bulbs, form from the original (mother) bulb you planted. Those daughter bulbs will eventually produce flowers that will replace the

smaller bulbs will increase in size thanks to energy reserves it receives from the mother bulb. It may take a couple growing seasons before the bulblets become large enough to flower on its own, but some do flower the next spring. Eventually the daughter bulbs will produce their own bulblets to continue the reproduction cycle.

REPLY

Donna Obrien (not verified) 1 year 11 months ago

I am a 5 yr gardener of small vegetable garden & 3 flower gardens & this is my first tulip planting from tulip received from son so your advice is so important & simple & I appreciate all your instructions I seek to succeed as a happy retired woman doing as my mother did but all for the beauty of color & fresh food-thank you so very much Almanac 😊🌸🌷

REPLY

Jennifer Keating 1 year 11 months
ago

We can't wait to hear about your
soon-to-be-growing tulips!

REPLY

Laurence Vaughan (not verified) 2 years
ago

I've recently planted 5 tulips in a tub and had a
deer come in and eat the tops of 4 out of 5
plants, do they continue to grow or is that it for
this year and do I just leave the bulbs in situ ?

REPLY

MORE COMMENTS

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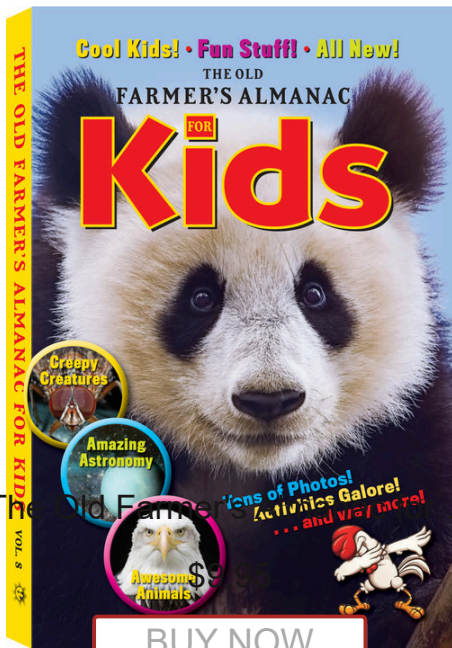
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