

## A FEW OF MY FAVORITE THINGS- FALL BLOOMING BULBS, THAT IS.

Fall *crocus*, *Sterbergia* and *Colchium* are underused and hard to find locally fall planted bulbs that actually bloom in the fall. Red Spider Lilies and Ox Blood Lilies also fit into this category but are much larger flowers. The *crocus*, *sterbergia* and *Colchium* bulbs are ideal for the rock garden where their fall flowers are easily seen among the other low-growing plants. While the leaves of *crocus* and *sterbergia* are relatively tidy, *colchicum* foliage is so large and floppy, that many gardeners find them unsightly in the rock garden. All three are suitable for planting among low groundcovers such as periwinkle, creeping jenny, creeping thyme or bugleweed. True fall *crocus* may be naturalized in chemical free lawns as long as the foliage gets a chance to ripen before the first spring mowing. The Red Spider Lily and Ox Blood Lily are also fall planted and fall blooming bulbs but range in size from 10-16" to 18-24" tall. These guys are also hard to find locally. Red Spider lilies are usually passed along from one gardener to another. All are great additions to the fall garden, blooming when very little else is.

**Fall Crocus** is one of my favorite fall bloomers. The fall blooming *crocus* comes in shades of white, purple and pinks. You can easily naturalize these in your chemical free lawns. They quickly increase by both seeds and offsets. They need spring sun but can stand denser shade after they have their foliage. Gritty, poor, well-drained soil is to their liking. They are hardy to zone 4-9, 3-5" tall, and bloom early fall. They are a relative of the well-known spring *crocus*. Plant about 3" deep. The **sativus fall** *crocus* is the original **saffron** *crocus* whose red stigmas are used for flavoring and coloring food.

***Sterbergia lutea* or Autumn Daffodil** is another great fall bloomer. It looks like a *crocus* on steroids with 1 ½" yellow *crocus* shaped bloom. It blooms in early fall. Flowers appear atop stems that are 6" tall. Narrow, lance-shaped, deep green leaves appear in autumn at about the same time as the flowers. Foliage will persist through winter, and then die down. Zone 6-9. Plant in full sun in moderately fertile, gritty, dry to medium moisture, well-drained soils in full sun to part shade. Best in full sun. Will slowly form clumps if left undisturbed. Great addition to front of borders, rock gardens, foundations or along sidewalks or in containers.

**Colchicum** or (often misnamed) **Autumn Crocus** is another of my favorite fall blooming bulbs. This bulb is hard to find locally and is planted in the fall also. Commonly referred to as the autumn crocus or meadow saffron, colchicums are not related to crocus at all, but are actually more closely related to lilies. Beginning in mid-September and continuing into November, colchicums produce large, goblet-like blooms in shades of pink, violet or white. In spring, colchicums offer relatively large, broad leaves. There are quite a number of fall-flowering colchicums and most are hardy to at least USDA Zone 5, maybe colder if given extra winter protection. Most are about 4-6" tall and prefer a sunny location. Colchicums have quite large bulbs and should be planted about 4-6" deep. As with the spring bulbs, allow their foliage to die down naturally so the bulbs can accumulate the reserves necessary for future bloom.

**RED SPIDER LILIES** (*Lycoris radiata*) is yet another great fall bloomer. A common name is Equinox flowers. They will usually bloom around the fall equinox. Their red blooms appear in early fall looking like bright red fireworks. The foliage follows the flower, staying green well through the winter and into late spring. Zones 6-9. They are both heat and drought tolerant. Full sun to part shade and 18-24" high. We usually have some at the spring plant sale but they look so ragged or dead that no one willingly buys them.

**OX BLOOD LILY, SCHOOL HOUSE LILY, HURRICAN LILY** (*Rhodophiala bifida*) is another hard to find but great fall blooming bulb. Taking its name from the deep red blooms it produces, the Oxblood Lily is an outstanding and durable bulb perfect for any Southern garden. They produce beautiful large red trumpet shaped blooms. Zones 6-9, again heat and drought tolerant and full Sun. Summer shade is ok. 10-16" high.

## ***PLANTING SPRING BULBS IN CONTAINERS***

Now is the time to plant spring bulbs in containers for those beautiful spring blooms. Be sure to pack the containers full of bulbs for the best display. Not only will these containers create focal points throughout the garden, but they will also welcome visitors at entryways and add a touch of bright color to the spring garden. This is a great solution for someone with limited garden space or only a patio to garden on.

Any bulb can be planted in a container, but tulips are best because of their simple form and infinite choice of colors. You can combine different types of bulbs in a single container, but be sure they bloom at the same time, or you will have that unsightly dying foliage marring your display. Planting only one type of bulb per container gives you maximum impact. Try staggering bloom times in different containers for a succession of blooms from March through mid-May.

### ***Planting a Container:***

Use a 24" container with good drainage.

If planting one type of bulb use 40 tulips, 40 large flowered daffodils, 50 small-flowered daffodils or 100 minor bulbs, like Crocus, Muscari, Scilla, or Iris species. I like to use either the tulips or large daffodils mixed with Crocus.

Use a good grade of potting soil and fill the bottom third of container, mix in some time released fertilizer, such as Miracle Grow, Osmocote, bone meal, or bulb fertilizer. Add more potting soil to fill container to the recommended planting depth of the bulbs you are using. Add bulbs and finish filling container with soil, being sure to leave at least ½" space between the surface of the soil and the top of the container for easy watering.

If you are planting a container with different species of bulbs, commonly called "Lasagna Planting", plant the larger bulbs first, cover them with soil and then plant the smaller bulbs at their recommended planting depth. See diagram.

Water planted container thoroughly, then water periodically throughout the winter. You don't want the bulbs sitting in soil that is too wet; the bulbs will rot.

### ***OVERWINTERING:***

I set my planted containers either in an unheated garage or in a protected area of the gardens until late Feb. or early March, when the bulbs start to emerge, and then place at focal points or throughout the garden. I place mine on the front porch for the winter, overplanted with violas. You could also use pansies.

After the flowers have faded, plant the bulbs in the garden. Tulips tend to not do well for me after the first year, so I compost them. Have fun and enjoy!

**Flower Bulb Layering for 2x - 4x the Blooms!**

