BULBS FOR SPRING

By Edna Lovelace Gaston, Master Gardener, Caswell County

Most bulbs will grow with little work other than putting them in the ground. However, a little extra preparation and maintenance pays great dividends. For the best results, use the following guidelines when planning and planting bulbs.

Selecting bulbs – Choose firm, well-shaped bulbs. If there are any soft spots or sign of mold, discard.

Ground - Prepare beds by cultivating the ground to a depth twice as deep as the planting depth. Loosening ground in the root zone will ensure proper growth and development as well as creating better drainage. If your soil is very sandy or heavy clay, add some type of organic matter (compost or leaf mold, for example). This increases moisture retention for sandy soils, or encourages drainage for clay soils.

Fertilize – After planting, top-dress with ½ cup of 5-10-10 or 5-10-5 per square yard. Immediately after flowering, repeat this process. This double application ensures vigorous growth and development as well as creating drainage. If you choose to use a slow-release fertilizer, you will only need to fertilize once in the fall following the label directions for application rates. But remember that excess nitrogen can discourage proper blooming in bulbs like daffodils.

Mulch - Mulching reduces weeds and creates additional organic matter for the following years plus protects bulbs which are tender or borderline hardy in this area. However, mulching hardy bulbs is not necessary and sometimes is detrimental. Use straw or light coatings of bark.

Foliage - Let foliage die back naturally. Removing it prematurely robs the plant and bulb of the ability to gather and store energy for the next season. Remove the foliage after it is dead to discourage diseases such as crown rot.

Water - In times of extreme drought, watering helps bulbs continue in their proper growth cycle. Excluding dormant periods (from foliage die back to early spring), a ½ inch of rain or water per week is sufficient.

Another way to enjoy bulbs is to put them into pots. Following this article is a chart of suggested planting depth for bulbs. Select a container that is at least a couple of inches taller than the depth of the largest bulbs you have selected. The diameter will depend on the number of bulbs in the display. However, a large container will moderate the temperature changes of winter better.

Start filling the container by adding a couple of inches of good potting soil then add the bulbs with the deepest planting requirement. Cover with more soil to the next depth measurement and arrange another layer of bulbs. Try to place each layer of bulbs so that it is not directly above the bulbs of the preceding layer. Continue alternating layers until the last layer of soil is 2 to 3 inches below the container rim. This leaves room to ensure that when the container is watered the soil will not wash out. Complete the container by planting panies, snap dragons, dusty miller, low growing herbs such as thyme or some other groundcover.

Place the container in a sunny location, preferably near an entrance or walkway and just wait for spring!!!!!

Photo by Alice LeDuc
**HERB OF THE MONTH**

*By Edna Lovelace Gaston, Master Gardener, Caswell County*

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**Levisticum officinale - Lovage**

**Height:** 5 ft.

**Flowers:** June to September, tiny yellow

**Propagation:** seeds or division, will self-sow freely

**Growing conditions:** full sun to partial shade, moist, fertile, well-drained soil

**Cultivation:** Snip flowers and cut frequently to encourage growth. Young leaves are more flavorful, with a taste reminiscent of celery. Divide the plant every 3 or so years. Sow seeds in late summer or early fall.

**Uses:** cooking – add to salads, soups, stews whenever celery flavor is desired.

**History:** This herb was very popular in the Middle Ages and reputedly was grown in Charlemagne’s garden. In recent years it has fallen some in popularity.

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Since the herb dies down in winter, pot up some of the little plants that sprout near the parent and move indoors into a sunny window. It will provide a fresh addition to cooking. Drying lovage is another option. Dig up the roots, wash, slice and spread on a screen. To dry the leaves, place in a shady location with good air circulation to dry. When completely dry, put in a clean, air tight container and store in a cool dark location.

Lovage is dried just as any other herb - cut tender growth, tied in a small bundle, hang in a shady, dry location until the leaves are thoroughly dried. Leaves can be blanched in boiling water, cooled immediately, drained then stored in the freezer.

Lovage has beautiful ornamental foliage and a nice fragrance - a splendid background plant. It makes a tasty addition to a salad and is much easier to grow than celery. Try it – you’ll like it!

**Additional Information:**


OCTOBER TO DO!
Landscaping & Lawn Care
By Onda Marable, Master Gardener, Vance County

- Rake and save those fall leaves. Run the mower over them before adding to the compost pile.
- Start paperwhites for blooms during the Christmas season. Leave them outside in a sunny space until bulbs emerge then bring indoors.
- Dig and save caladium and dahlia bulbs.
- Transplant or plant perennials, shrubs and trees. While you will not see new growth, the roots will grow through the winter and the plants will have a jump start for the spring.
- To protect plant roots and reduce winter weeds, mulch perennials, shrubs and trees.
- Mark your perennials so you will not accidentally step on or dig them up.
- Clean up your annual and perennial beds but remember to leave flower seed heads as food for the birds.
- Grasses and seed heads add interest to bare flower beds during the winter.
- Water your cool season grass during dry spells and mow if necessary. Some warm season grasses, when dormant, will tolerate the application of certain non-selective herbicides for control of annual weeds.
- Consider getting or adding to your houseplant collection. Many houseplants are not only beautiful but will clean the inside air and add humidity to your living space.
- Bring in the Christmas Cactus that has spent the summer outside. Its blooms will cheer any part of your house.

INTERESTING TIDBITS
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

Food for thought in the on-going debate of whether organically grown food has any better nutrient quality: “... A ‘State of Science Review’ just issued by the Organic Center (90063 Troy Road, Enterprise, OR 97828) reveals that in 97 published studies, average contents of 11 nutrients were 24% higher in organically than chemically grown food plants.” The article goes on to say that the probable reason is the improved soil quality when organic methods are used. From the April 2009 issue of “The Avant Gardener,” Vol. 41, No. 6.

As we know, violas are generally more vigorous, more cold-tolerant, and have a longer blooming season than their larger-flowered cousins, pansies. The ‘Rain Blue and Purple’ viola took top honors in this year’s All-America Selections annual competition. It has 1 ½ inch flowers that open purple and white and mature to purple and blue. Single plants spread 10-14 inches and have a trailing habit, which makes them perfect for containers as well as for bedding. From an article by Carla Burgess in the October 2009 issue of Carolina Country magazine.

The NC State Fair flower show is returning to its former splendor and beyond since retired NC Master Gardener Coordinator Erv Evans took over its management this spring. When you go next year, be sure to check it out.

Add these fall bloomers to the usual pansies for visual relief: ginger lilies (Hedychium), angel trumpets (Brugmansia), dahlias, native Malaviscus (small hibiscus-like flowers), Mexican giant cigar plant (Cuphea micropetala), native Georgia savory (Clinopodium georganianum), Rostrinucula, goldenrods (Solidago), native swamp sunflower (Helianthus angustifolius), native asters, and ornamental grasses. This paragraph and the preceding one were taken from Tony Avent’s October e-newsletter.

P.S. to the October Plant of the Month: The ‘Honerine Jobert’ and ‘Crispa’ anemones continue to make a stunningly beautiful display as of the 24th.

On the web:
The Garden Path Newsletter
vance.ces.ncsu.edu/content/thegardenpath
Vance County Extension
vance.ces.ncsu.edu
Warren County Extension
warren.ces.ncsu.edu
Urban Horticulture at NC State University:
www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/consumer

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ROSE TIPS FOR THE MONTH
By Heidi Moore, Master Gardener, Warren County

November is the month we should begin to change our rose care procedures. I discontinue deadheading but pay particular attention to hygiene involving each plant and the surrounding area. As the weather begins to change, with some cool nights and warm days, your plants will start to show signs of leaf shedding. Be sure to clean up any leaves and petal debris that fall and remove blooms that become moldy or disease ridden. This is a particularly vulnerable time for your roses to contract black spot and mildew because of the cold nights and high dew levels. It is even more important to continue to spray with a fungicide to keep diseases under control until your roses have finished shedding all their leaves. Continue to monitor rain amounts as your roses, as well as all your other garden shrubs, will need to be kept hydrated.

Care of container roses should also continue. Keep your pots well hydrated and be sure to clean any leaf or blossom waste to prevent any disease or insect problems. If your containers are in a well protected area, you should be able to leave them where they are. Moving them inside a garage or shed would be your safest location, but it is very important that you continue to give your plants water during the dormant season. Heavy pruning of your container roses should be left until the spring, but you can cut them back for easier handling at this time. Continue to spray with a fungicide until all foliage has dropped.

We as gardeners do not know how severe the coming winter will be, so we need to prepare for the worst and hope for the best. Preventative care and common sense is our best defense.

PLANT OF THE MONTH
By Marty Finkel, Master Gardener, Granville County

Gladiolus dalenii ‘Halloweenie’

This late fall-flowering gladiolus refuses to be outdone by all the flaming colors of the autumn leaves and holds its own among the most brilliant. The flowers, on its 5 foot tall flower spike, are an intense scarlet orange with a yellow throat, not unlike the markings of candy corn. It blooms in November and would be striking in a flower arrangement for Halloween. Originating in South Africa, it is hardy in Zones 7-9. Plant in full sun, average soil with good drainage and provide water during dry times.

Photo by Tim Alderton at the JCRA November 17, 2008.

OCTOBER TO DO!
Fruits and Veggies
By Carl Shafer, Master Gardener, Vance County

• Remove any old mummified fruit on trees, bushes, or vines and from the ground as these can be sources of disease next year. Also continue to cleanup garden plants as they finish producing.
• Late fall and early winter is good time to plant fruit and nut trees. Container blueberries can also be planted now. Other berry plants are normally planted in the spring. Check local nurseries for plants.
• Plant your garlic now if you have not already done so.
• Continue to collect leaves and compost them.
• Clean and repair, if necessary, your garden tools and equipment before putting them away for the winter.
• Use the internet to order some seed catalogs if you are interested in trying some new or different vegetable varieties next year. Also most garden magazines, at this time of the year, will have many mail order seed company advertisements. A sample listing of catalogs can be found in the Jan 09 issue of this publication.