



November Tips

PERENNIALS, ANNUALS AND BULBS

by Diane Relf, Extension Specialist, Environmental Horticulture

- Looking for a new perennial in your garden? Try Puschkinia (*Puschkinia scilloides*), a member of the lily family. This fascinating plant has a star-shaped flower with six points. Flowers appear in mid-March, and the bloom lasts for several weeks. Puschkinia is an excellent plant choice for rock gardens, planted 3 inches deep in a sunny or lightly shaded spot.
- If you have a spot in your garden that has wet soil (especially bog-type areas), then pitcher plants (*Sarracenia hybrids*) are perfect for you! Pitcher plants have flowers in red or yellow, but the pitcher-shaped leaf display is outstanding in August through October. These plants are hardy, having survived exposure to -6F, but can be overwintered in pots in an unheated greenhouse as long as the plants are not allowed to dry out completely. Next spring, plant a few *Sarracenia* and watch your neighbors drool!
- After several killing frosts have occurred this fall, cut back dormant perennials to about 3 inches above ground. After the ground is frozen, plants can be mulched to guard against displacement due to soil heaving. These steps ensure a successful show of plant foliage and color next season.
- Dense planting in containers works best for small bulbs. Plant as many bulbs as fit, as long as they do not touch each other or the pot. For a 6-inch pot, try 6 tulip or 15 crocus bulbs.
- Spring bulbs grow best at approximately 55F, so keep potted narcissus, tulips, and other bulbs away from vents or other heat sources.
- For best growth, plant spring bulbs where they are out of the direct sun during the middle of the day. Bulbs have a chilling requirement that is satisfied by winter soil temperatures, so avoid planting bulbs near heated basements where the soil may not stay adequately cold.
- Move containers holding live plants to a protected spot, if possible. Protect the roots by covering the soil and the container with a thick layer of straw or leaves. Check the moisture level of the pots every few weeks, and water if needed.
- Some plants are very sensitive to de-icing salts. Use sand or sawdust on walkways near plantings to prevent falls.
- Invert large flowerpots over semi-hardy perennials, such as dusty miller, to protect the plants in winter. Uncover the plants during warm spells.
- Buy commercially prepared lily-of-the-valley pips from your florist or garden center. Plant as many as possible in pots to secure an abundance of fragrant blooms. One bonus of these bulbs is they tolerate more heat than other commonly forced bulbs.

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- Tulips and Dutch iris need to be planted in cold soil so they do not send up shoots before roots are established. If tulips are planted deeply, they will produce large uniform flowers for many years. Deep planting also makes the bulbs less susceptible to mouse and squirrel damage.
- Bulb forcing can be continued through late winter. Garden centers are sure to have the price reduced on any remaining bulbs.
- Still holding bulbs for outdoor planting when a cold spell is predicted? Cover the area where they are to be planted with a thick layer of leaves, straw, or hay secured with boards or branches. This will keep the ground from freezing until it warms enough to get the bulbs in the ground.
- After chrysanthemums are killed by frost, cut them down in preparation for winter. Apply a 2 - 3 inch layer of loose mulch such as leaves after the ground has frozen.
- As soon as chrysanthemums are through flowering, remove the stalks to within a few inches of the ground. This will help root development and make plants send out vigorous sprouts in the spring. Some may be lifted and heeled into the cold frame. Plants for potting can be propagated from the side sprouts that will develop next May. Dispose of stems and all dropped and dried leaves and branches.
- Prepare a trench and sow sweet peas in late fall for seeds to lie dormant for spring germination.
- Peonies can be planted now in full sun and fertile well-drained soil that is rich in organic matter. Dig holes 18 inches and fill halfway with a mixture of soil, compost, and a handful of 5-10-10 fertilizer. Add a few more inches of soil, and set the tubers so the buds are 1 to 2 inches below the soil surface. Backfill, firm the soil, and water thoroughly. Peonies do not grow well after being moved and will not bloom for several years.
- Many perennials and rock garden plants may be planted or divided and replanted during the fall. Set them out early enough to establish their roots before the ground freezes.
- Watch for standing water in perennial beds after long periods of rain. Water that collects on the surface during winter will freeze and can damage perennials. Dig shallow trenches to help drain excess water away. Make a note to raise that bed in spring.
- Reduce peony botrytis blight and hollyhock rust by removing and disposing of all old stems this fall. This reduces the carry-over of the diseases during the winter, and you will have less trouble next year.

Monthly Tips have been prepared since 1986 by various staff of the Office of Consumer Horticulture including Ellen Bennett, Michelle Buckstrup, Susan Day, Susan DeBolt, Sharon Dendy, Kate Dobbs, Sheri Dom, David Gravel, Virginia Nathan, Jenny Shuster, Ellen Silva, and Ruth Sorenson. Resource material for the development of this information includes the Virginia Master Gardener Handbook; Extension Publications and newsletters from VCE, numerous other states, and the USDA; and an extensive library of over 900 books, magazines and journals. Project funded by The Virginia Gardener Newsletter subscription fees. Diane Relf, Project Director and Content Specialist.

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