



Photo by Leo Michels

# emma's HINTS & tips

## Spring Bulbs

Spring is such a joy, the sign of promise that warmer weather is on the way after such a long cold winter.

I just adore cultivated narcissus and tulips and I am always seduced by bulb catalogues in autumn for fancy, frilly and unusual coloured spring bulbs. Yet as I look into my garden I am full of joy as they stand tall and extrovert!

The joy starts in January with delicate snowdrops which are best planted in the green from the garden centres direct into the ground. This is more expensive than planting the bulbs in September, but they settle better and grow into a larger clump quicker. You can also lift and divide existing snowdrops every other year. Don't be afraid to really thin them out, as they quickly multiply and self seed. Remember to plant a little deeper with additional compost and water well.

I really enjoy my orange tulips (*Tulipa* 'Prinses Irene') in my front garden planted with *Pittosporum tenuifolium* 'Tom Thumb'. The combination of the black/purple foliage with the orange tulip petals provide a real contrast of colour and give great impact.

I am also pleased with a clump of daffodils (*Narcissus* 'Tahiti') which are large double flowering with a deeper orange centre against the outer lemon yellow petals and there is a wonderful scent. However, as they have a larger flower, if it rains they become heavy, so an added support is necessary.

Another gem just emerging is my allium collection dotted around the flower beds. My favourite is *Allium giganteum* which provides such a dense perfectly round head of purple flowers you have to squeeze it!

All my bulbs are planted well into the flower beds. Only the snowdrops are planted in the first 30cm of the beds if required, but the remaining bulbs are never in the first 30cm. One reason is that I don't like to see the dying foliage, so if I plant the bulbs well into the beds, by the time the daffodils and tulips have past, my perennials are 15cm tall and well on their way to out growing the bulb foliage. A win win situation!

Now is the time to place markers in the flower bed where there are gaps requiring spring bulbs to be planted in the autumn. No matter how you may think you will remember the gaps, believe me it is impossible, and by autumn, if there has been no cold frost, existing late summer perennials may still be in flower, so it is difficult to imagine the gaps. I use old hazel whips or bamboo canes about 30cm in height, just enough to point out the area.

For new bulbs always consider existing plants and back drops that will affect the new bulbs. For example I love the black tulip (*Tulipa* 'Queen of Night') but they require a light coloured partner or back-drop or the colour is lost. If planted against a dark fence you will not see them. Best to consider existing blossom in the garden and add the same colour in the bulb beneath the flowering blossom for greater impact.

Good luck and each spring will be more rewarding!

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