

It's My Park | Bulb Planting

Last Updated: November 9, 2023

All planting projects must be approved by NYC Parks staff.

Planting flower bulbs in the fall can bring a wave of color and beauty come springtime or early summer. The term “bulb” refers to plants that have underground, fleshy storage structures. Botanically speaking, bulbs can be true bulbs, corms, tubers, or rhizomes. Bulbs are their own complete storage unit and contain all the nutrients they will need for the year. Because of this, they are fairly easy to plant and maintain and bring great rewards come springtime.

Planting Tips

- *Learn about the type of bulb before planting.*
 - For the best chance of success, you will need to consider what type of area the bulb thrives in, how deep to dig each hole, how many bulbs to place in each hole, and how far apart they should be spaced. Asking a park gardener or other park staff on site will be helpful along with referring to the directions on the bulb packaging.
- *Plant at the right time of year.*
 - Bulbs should be planted in the fall once the ground is cool but not frozen. Bulb planting usually stops after the first freeze, typically in early November. This is important so that the bulb will remain dormant until warmer weather and will not be damaged by the cold weather.
- *Prepare the area.*
 - Before planting, assess the area and make sure it is clean and healthy. If necessary; remove any litter, weeds, leaves, or other debris. If the soil is compact and hard, you may also want to use a hand cultivator or iron rake to cultivate the soil and loosen it for planting.
- *Consider the design.*
 - Since the bulbs will not bloom until spring or summer, envision how the area will look before planting. You may want to consider planting a variety of

bulbs with different bloom times and colors so that the area remains full of flowers throughout the spring and summer. You may also want to plant bulbs in clusters, rows, or scattered randomly. It may help to dig all of the holes before planting, to provide a visual of how the plot will look in the spring. Digging a long trench and placing bulbs in the trench scattered or in rows is another option for planting.

- *Plant with the bulbs pointed side up.*
 - Bulbs should be placed with the pointed end facing upwards and the flat end, that sometimes already has small roots, facing downward.
- *Measure the depth and distance between each hole.*
 - Once you establish the depth needed for each hole and how spaced apart they should be, use your trowel and/or shovel to act as a measuring tool to ensure you are providing enough space. If there is mulch in your planting site, make sure to begin measuring your planting depth below the mulch where the soil begins. If you dig a hole too deep, you risk the bulb blooming late or not at all; if you dig a hole too shallow, you risk damage from cold weather or pests.
- *Water after planting.*
 - This helps the bulbs settle in the new environment and triggers root system growth before winter dormancy.

Common Bulbs Found in New York City's Parks



Allium

These true bulbs are primarily rodent and deer resistant, attractive to various pollinators including bees and butterflies, and available in various heights and sizes. Preferred areas for planting: Allium thrive in full or partial sun (if necessary) with well-draining soil.



Planting directions: The larger bulbs require 6" - 8" deep holes with spacing at least 10" apart from one another. The smaller bulbs require 4" deep holes with holes at least 4" apart. Each hole should only have one bulb planted in it.

Bloom time in NYC: Late spring to early summer



Crocus

These corms are fairly small, attract bees, often come back for multiple years, and are available in various colors.

Preferred areas for planting: Crocuses thrive in full or partial sun with well-draining soil.



Planting directions: The bulbs require 3" deep holes with spacing at least 3" - 4" apart from one another. As these flowers are small, it is recommended to plant bulbs in clusters fairly close together so they can be visible in the spring.

Bloom time in NYC: Early spring.



Daffodil

These true bulbs come in yellow and white varieties and are hardy flowers that are fairly rodent and deer resistant.

Preferred areas for planting: Daffodils thrive in full or partial sun with well-draining soil.

Planting directions: The bulbs require holes approximately 3 times as deep as its height, so if a bulb is 2" tall, you would dig a hole approximately 6" deep. They can tolerate some overcrowding but each bulb should



generally be in its own hole and spaced about 3" - 6" apart.

Bloom time in NYC: Early spring.



Hyacinth

These true bulbs come in a variety of colors and are known for their beauty and pleasant scent.

Preferred areas for planting: Hyacinths thrive in full or partial sun (if necessary) with well-draining soil. If they are kept in wet soil, they are vulnerable to mold and rot.



Planting directions: The bulbs require 4" - 6" deep holes with spacing at least 3" - 4" apart from one another. Each hole should be spaced about 4" apart. As these flowers are small, it is recommended to plant bulbs in clusters fairly close together so they can be visible in the spring.

Bloom time in NYC: Early to mid-spring.



Tulip

These true bulbs come in a variety of colors, sizes, and shapes. They are often known as the first sign of spring and can bring wonderful color as the winter season transforms into spring.

Preferred areas for planting: Tulips thrive in full or partial sun (if necessary) with loose, well-draining soil. If they are kept in wet soil, they are vulnerable to mold and rot.

Planting directions: The bulbs require 6" - 8" deep hole



with spacing at least 3" - 4" apart from one another.

Tulips are vulnerable to pests and disease so digging a deep enough hole is important. Each hole should be spaced about 4" apart. It is recommended to plant tulips fairly close together in clusters or rows to highlight their beauty in the spring.

Bloom time in NYC: Early spring.

References:

Boeckmann, C. (2020). *Gardening - growing guides*. The Old Farmer's Almanac.
<https://www.almanac.com/gardening/growing-guides>