

# Plant Fall Bulbs in Containers for Spring Blooms

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Planting bulbs in containers has several advantages. It is easy because there is no need to dig in the garden. Containers can bring blooms close to the house; small containers can be placed in the house. Containers with plants that have different bloom times can extend the season from early, mid, to late spring and into summer.

**Containers:** Use any clean, dry container with drainage holes. Bulbs can rot in standing water or soggy soil. The container should be deep enough to hold adequate soil for the roots of the largest bulbs you are planting.

**Soil:** Use a multi-purpose potting soil mix which usually contains fertilizer. Do not use garden soil, topsoil, or compost. Potting soil is formulated for containers. If you use Pro-Mix, moisten it well before planting.

**Planting:** For planting one layer of bulbs in a deep container, measure one inch down from the top plus the number of inches down for the recommended planting depth of the bulb. Fill the bottom of the container up to the recommended planting depth. Plant the bulbs close to each other (not more than an inch apart) and cover with soil. The tip end of the bulb should be on top. If you cannot decide which is the root or tip end, plant the bulb on its side; the plant will grow towards the light. Make sure the bulbs are not touching the wall of the container or they might freeze. Leave about an inch between the soil and the top of the container for watering when planted and later, when needed, so the bulbs do not dry out.



For one layer of bulbs, consider the same or mixed colors, the same or different heights, but choose the same bloom time for a more dramatic effect. To protect bulbs from squirrels, mice, or other critters, cut

chicken wire to cover the planted area of the container and press the sides into the soil. The bulbs will grow through the wire. Another option is to use repellents.

**“Bulb Lasagna”- Planting in Layers:** When planting layers of different bulbs in one large container, start with soil on the bottom then the largest bulb at its recommended depth. Cover with an inch or two of soil and continue planting in layers from the largest bulb to the smallest at the top. The earliest bloomer should be at the top with the latest bloomer on the bottom layer. Cover each layer and the top with soil, then water and drain well. Cool season flowering plants, like pansies, can be added above the top layer for color until the bulbs grow. Suggested bulbs for early season – dwarf Iris or crocus; mid-season – daffodils; late season – tulips. Fill the layers with bulbs because they will grow up and around each other making a colorful display. Check plant information from growers for season of bloom and planting depth.

**Overwintering:** In our region, containers can be planted in mid-October to November. The bulbs need 8-14 weeks of chilling at 35°- 45°F to form good flowers. Overwinter the pots in a cold frame, unheated shed, garage, or outdoors with protection from freezing, rain, snow, or animals.

**Spring:** When green shoots sprout, bring the containers into the light and place them in their display areas. Container bulbs are often grown as annuals, but they can be harvested for planting in the ground the next fall. Let the leaves turn brown before cutting them and removing the bulbs. Keeping bulbs in the same container until the following fall does not always produce a good display.

