



REGINA FARMS  
5181 Milford Road  
East Stroudsburg, PA 18302

(570)223-8358  
Email: [info@reginafarms.com](mailto:info@reginafarms.com)  
Website: [www.reginafarms.com](http://www.reginafarms.com)

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## *Your Indoor Outdoor guide to gardening* **SEPTEMBER**

### BUYING & PLANTING SPRING FLOWERING BULBS

To insure a pleasing spring display, start with bulbs that are firm; avoid any that show bruises or are beginning to mold. Squeeze the bulb gently to be sure that the bulb has not begun to dry out in its skin.

The larger size bulbs will result in a larger, better quality plant, since the first year's nutrients are all contained within the bulb. Many tulips only provide one year of big, showy display. Try planting them deeper, or select daffodils or crocus, if bloom in successive years is important to you. Remove spent blooms so the plant's energy goes towards developing a bigger bulb and better blooming next year. An exception to this rule are smaller bulbs, like winter aconite, scilla, and grape hyacinth, which are excellent self-sowers and will naturalize more quickly if allowed to go to seed. Always allow foliage to yellow before removing.

How do you decide what quantity to buy? Generally, tulips will require between 50-60 bulbs/m<sup>2</sup> for massed planting, crocus 100-150/m<sup>2</sup>, and daffodils 40 large or 100 small/m<sup>2</sup>. Trenching or digging out the entire bed is usually easier than using a bulb planter. The most important consideration is drainage; bulbs are susceptible to rotting if soil doesn't drain properly. If you have any concerns about an area, consider planting in raised beds. Lay out bulbs, growing tip up the in the planting bed. As a rule of thumb, bulbs should be planted about three times a deep as the bulb is wide. Purchases from most reputable growers will come with specific planting instructions. Spread a commercial bulb fertilizer lightly over the top of the planting bed. Apply a 2" – 4" layer of lightweight mulch to prevent spring frost damage. Water the area thoroughly after planting.

Timing for planting spring bulbs in Zones 4-7 usually ranges from September for colder climates through November further south. When night temperatures are consistently between 40-50 degrees, but at least 6 weeks before the ground freezes, is the optimum time to plant. This will allow the bulbs to establish a healthy root system before winter. Then sit back and wait for spring when the "noses" will appear.

By Sharon Keen, Penn State Master Gardener

### LAWNS

- Continue to mow the lawn until growth ceases for the year. Cool season grasses (Kentucky bluegrass, tall fescue and perennial ryegrass) will grow faster and need more frequent mowing. If your lawn has already gone dormant due to drought, discontinue mowing.
- Fertilize your lawn in mid to late September to give it an early start for next spring.
- This is also the best time to start a new lawn or reseed bare spots in the lawn.
- Keep weeds from forming seeds, and remove seed heads promptly. Control winter annual or perennial weeds by applying herbicide.

### FRUITS

- Remove raspberry canes after they bear fruit.
- Harvest late cultivars of blueberries.

- Pears should be harvested while green on the tree. Tree-ripened fruits often develop a grainy texture.
- Fall weed control in orchards is important to reduce insect problems next year.
- Stop spraying Diazinon at least 10 days prior to picking apples (14 days prior for pears), to allow the pesticide residue time to degrade.

## HERBS

- Put up some chives, parsley, and other perennials for use in an indoor garden.
- Preserve herbs by freezing or drying them.

## HOUSEPLANTS

- Clean up plants and prepare to bring them indoors, before the night temperatures fall below 55F. Remove dead leaves and stems as well as any soil on the outside of the pot. Check for insects prior to bringing plants in.
- Be sure to wash windows for maximum winter light for houseplants.
- Some herbs, such as parsley or sage, can be dug up, potted, and used as houseplants.
- To re-bloom poinsettias: Cut back the ends of all branches; keep the plants in darkness (cover with a box) for 15+ hours every night; and provide 6-9 hours of daylight until the bracts show color.
- To re-bloom Christmas cactus, stop fertilizing in September. In October and November, provide darkness for 15 hours a night in a cool place (50-60F). Water plants bimonthly.

## COMPOST

- Check the compost pile for finished material. Test a few seeds of tomatoes or other rapidly germinating seed, in a mix of 1/3 compost to 2/3 soil to see if they will germinate.

## VEGETABLE GARDENS

- Continue harvest, including gourds, before frost
- Keep herbs producing by removing flowers and seedpods of basil, mint, parsley, sage and thyme.
- Winter squash and pumpkin keep well if the rind is completely orange and hard (cannot be punctured by a fingernail), there are no cuts, or bruises, and a part of the stem remains attached.
- Cold-hardy vegetables are seeded now: peas, lettuce, green onion sets and spinach.
- Cool-weather, quick maturing radishes can still be planted for several harvests this fall.
- Plant garlic cloves.
- Harvest mature garlic and onions when the tops have dried up, then braid together for winter storage. Onions with thick necks do not store well and should be used first.
- Slug damage is likely to increase.
- Dig late potatoes.

## PERENNIALS, ANNUALS, & BULBS

- Start perennials from seed this month. Allow seeds of delphinium and hollyhock to self-sow.
- Collect wildflower seed from native plants.
- Many perennials do best planted in the fall.
- Divide and plant daylilies, iris, peonies, and Phlox. Eliminate weak or diseased plants.
- Harvest cut flowers for drying – baby's breath, Celosia, statice, and strawflower. Hang plants upside-down in a dry and well-ventilated area.
- Early fall planting of ferns will provide the best results. Plant them in moist, shady areas. Add several inches of leaf mold or peat to the soil prior to planting for best results.

- Add organic matter and fertilizer to the soil prior to planting irises. Remove dead leaves, trim fans to 4 inches tall. Plant near the surface (top of rhizomes just visible), 12-18 inches apart. Water often for a few weeks.
- Dig up summer bulbs (e.g., gladioli, dahlias, tuberous begonias) and store in a dark, well-ventilated area before the temperature drops below 50 F or before light frost.

## ROSES

- Do not deadhead or fertilize now.
- Prune out only diseased or damaged canes.
- Buy roses for fall planting.

## TREES & SHRUBS

- Prior to leaves dropping, prune out dead wood.
- For an energy-efficient landscape: Place evergreens on the north and northwest sides to block winter winds. To block early morning sun, plant deciduous trees on the east, to block late afternoon sun, plant on the west. Do not plant on the south side: trees here would block cooling summer breezes.
- Transplant when the night temperatures are in the forties and the days are no longer warm. Do not add fertilizer to the planting hole.
- If you plan on moving an established tree or shrub next spring, root-prune them now.
- Unless planning to move them, begin to decrease supplemental watering this month. If it is a dry fall, you will need to water monthly through November.
- Avoid using string trimmers and mowers around the bases of trees and shrubs. Use mulch around the bases far enough out to allow for movers and string trimmers to care for the lawn without coming too close.