

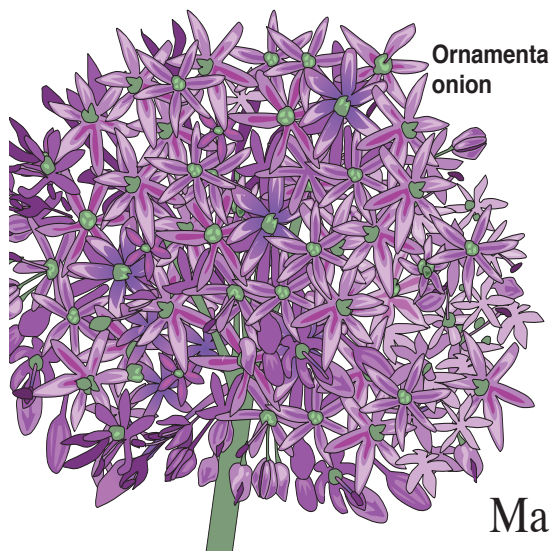
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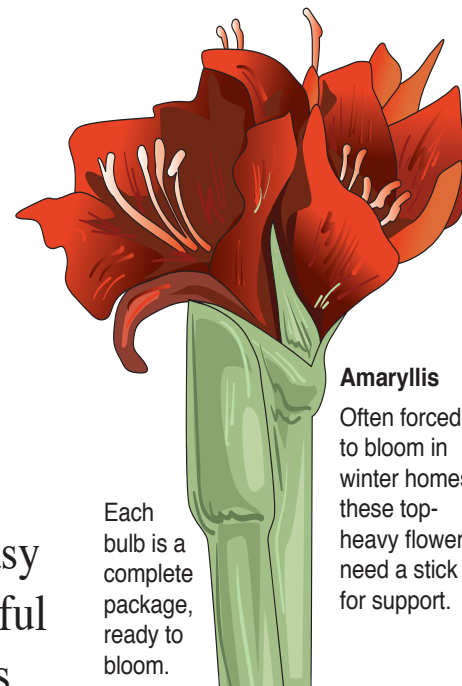
# WORLD OF WONDER

Exploring the realms of history, science, nature and technology

# FLOWERING BULBS



Ornamental onion



**Amaryllis**  
Often forced to bloom in winter homes, these top-heavy flowers need a stick for support.

Each bulb is a complete package, ready to bloom.



## True bulbs

Some plants have evolved underground storage organs, such as corms, tubers, rhizomes and **bulbs**.

Plants in the lily family (tulips, lilies, muscaris) and the amaryllis family (narcissus, amaryllis, etc.) often produce true bulbs.

True bulbs contain a miniature plant surrounded by fleshy scales. The scales are mostly **carbohydrates** that nourish the young plant.

True bulbs can be **tunicate**, with a papery covering like an onion or tulip, or **non-tunicate**, with no paper covering over the scale.

## Did you know?

In tropical climates that do not have a cold season, spring bulbs need to be dug up and stored in a cold, dark place for several months. Later, when replanted and exposed to heat and light, they will bloom. This is called **forcing**.

The Netherlands (Holland) is the largest producer of bulbs in the world, producing about 77% of the world's supply.

Most flower bulbs are sold not for planting in home gardens, but for use as cut flowers in the florist industry. More than 90% of tulips and gladiolus bulbs are grown to be used as cut flowers.

## Stages of growth

Spring bulbs should be planted in the autumn about 4 to 5 inches (10 to 12.7 cm) deep to protect them from freezing in winter. They do best in climates with cool springs and dry summers.

In the spring, as temperatures warm, the bulb develops leaves that provide energy for the plant through **photosynthesis**.

The flower bloom fades within a couple weeks of opening and should be cut off soon after to prevent it from going to seed. The wilting foliage should be left to yellow so that new bulbs can form.

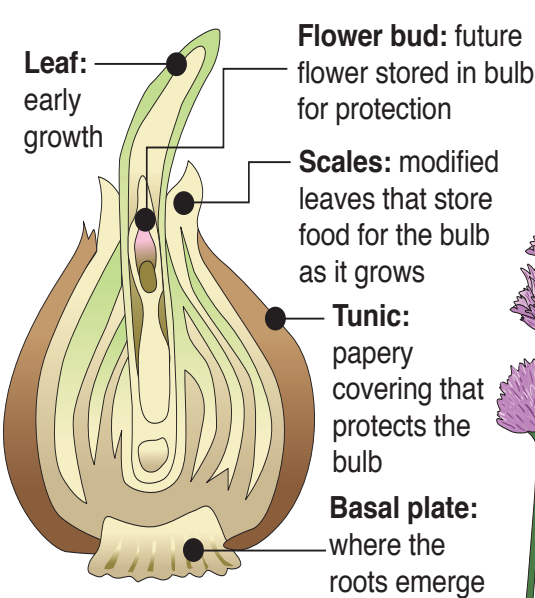
After the flower blooms, the leaves' energy goes toward building new small bulbs underground.

Over the winter, bulbs are in a state of semidormancy known as **vernalization**.

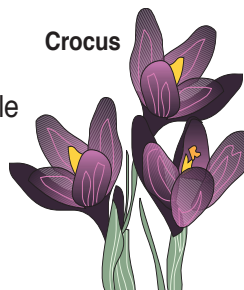
Many plants grow from bulbs, and most are very easy to grow. You are probably quite familiar with beautiful spring-flowering bulbs, such as the tulip, narcissus (daffodil), crocus and hyacinth. The best time to plant flowering bulbs is the autumn because almost all spring bulbs need a cold winter in order to bloom.

## Anatomy of a bulb

If you slice a bulb vertically, you should be able to see leaves, stems and even flower buds.



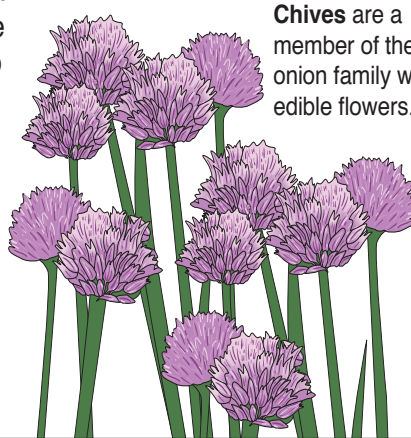
Crocus



Plant crocus bulbs (corms) in informal groups.

A **corm** is similar to a true bulb, but its storage tissue is the stem rather than the modified leaf (scale).

**Chives** are a member of the onion family with edible flowers.



Daffodils

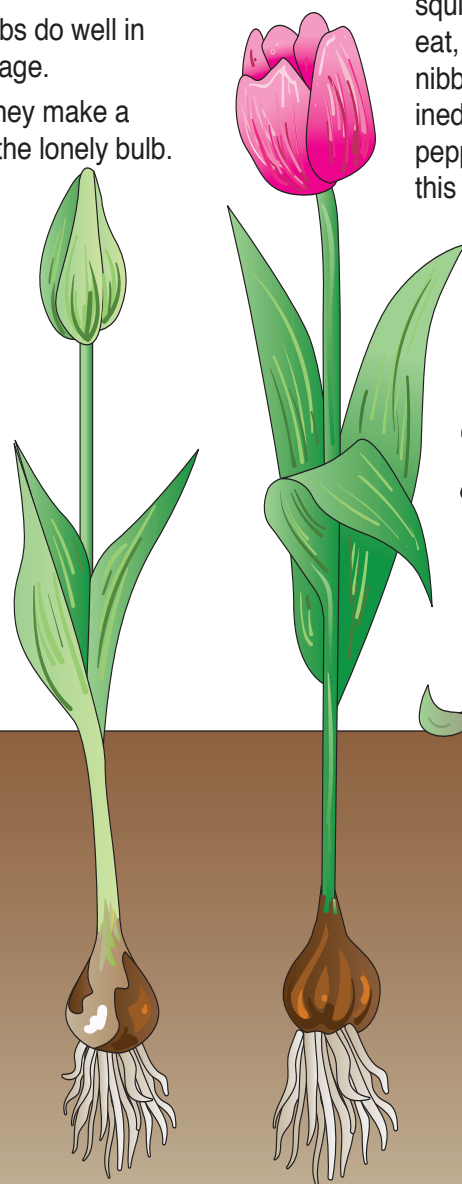


## Tips for choosing and planting bulbs

- When buying bulbs of any kind, choose the largest ones. They should feel firm and solid, without nicks.
- Steer clear of bulbs that are mushy or show signs of mold or fungus.
- Plant in either full or partial sun. Bulbs do well in almost any location with good drainage.
- Group your bulbs together so that they make a statement when they bloom. Avoid the lonely bulb.

## Pesky pests

The **North American eastern gray squirrel** likes to eat bulbs, and this can be a problem for many gardeners. They are especially fond of tulip and crocus bulbs. One way to discourage squirrels is to plant bulbs that they do not like to eat, such as daffodils or hyacinths. They may nibble on a few but will soon learn to leave the inedible ones alone. Some people put hot chili pepper in or on the ground with their bulbs, but this does not seem to work for very long.



Letting the leaves yellow will help the bulb reproduce.

Plant bulbs pointed end up, three times as deep as their height from the base. Tulips and crocus – favorite squirrel food – can go even deeper: tulips as deep as 8 inches (20 cm), crocus as deep as 6 inches (15 cm).



Once planted, the bulbs send out roots to pull water and nutrients from the soil.

SOURCES: World Book Encyclopedia, World Book Inc.; <https://web.extension.illinois.edu>; <http://www.digdropdone.com>; <https://www.gardeners.com>

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