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Plant Some Spring Time Bombs

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GARDEN NOTES

PLANT SOME SPRING TIME BOMBS

By Dennis Hinkamp

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Just as everything in the garden is dying, you can raise your spirits by planting bulbs among the decay. Think of them as little color time bombs that will explode next spring.

According to Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist, the Holy Grail of bulbs is Keukenhof Gardens in the Netherlands. This world famous bulb garden has spectacular displays of spring-blooming bulbs from the middle of April through about the middle of May. This horticulturist Nirvana, is a "must see" at least once in a lifetime.

Utah also has fantastic bulb gardens, although none is quite as spectacular as Keukenhof, Goodspeed concedes. The difference between a beautiful spring bulb garden and a bunch of bulbs, is the design. Whether incorporating a few bulbs in a small garden, or trying to populate an acre with the spring bloomers, a good plan and design is essential.

"You don't have to be blessed with a creative or artistic mind to design a beautiful spring bulb garden," he says. "Simply remember and observe a few basic principles when designing."

Selecting the color is a personal preference and decision, Goodspeed says. Many color combinations are available when working with bulbs. Keep in mind that too many colors can be a little overwhelming. A combination of two or three colors is preferred. Multiple colors in random patterns creates a more informal and natural look.

A large planting of one color is normally reserved for extensive formal areas, he adds. Most home gardens are smaller and look better with an informal design. Leave large blocks of color for the growing fields.

Create a focal point, he emphasizes. If only a few bulbs can be purchased, place the majority of them in one location. A small planting with many bulbs has a more dramatic effect than the same number of bulbs spread thinly over a large area.

Another element to keep in mind is timing, Goodspeed says. Most bulbs are sold with an early, mid or late season blooming time attached to the label. Not having all bulbs bloom at the same time helps extend the season. However, it can also spoil a great design if the two colors planned to compliment each other blossom at different times.

Consider how tall the flowers will be, he says. Generally, more than one height is desired

for blooming displays. This gives depth to the planting and adds interest. A planting with purple or red tulips shooting through a lower level of white tulips can be very dramatic. The white understory accentuates the vivid red or purple.

“The most common color combination with tulips and daffodils seems to be red and yellow,” Goodspeed says. “Don’t limit yourself to just one color combination in your landscape. Different mixtures can be planted in various areas of the landscape. It is fun to see the landscape colors change as spring progresses.”

For instance, he suggests planting one area in red, white and pink to emerge in the early spring. Try another bed with red and purple mid-bloomers arriving about the time the early bloomers are through. Another location could be planted with late bloomers exploding with colors to highlight the end of the season. This burst of color could be a nice selection of red and yellow tulips signaling the start of the warm season, or maybe white, pink, and yellow to prolong the cool spring.

One of the great things about designing with bulbs is it doesn't have to be permanent, Goodspeed says. They can be dug and removed after they have stopped blooming and the foliage has died. If a design or color combination did not turn out, try another one the next year.

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