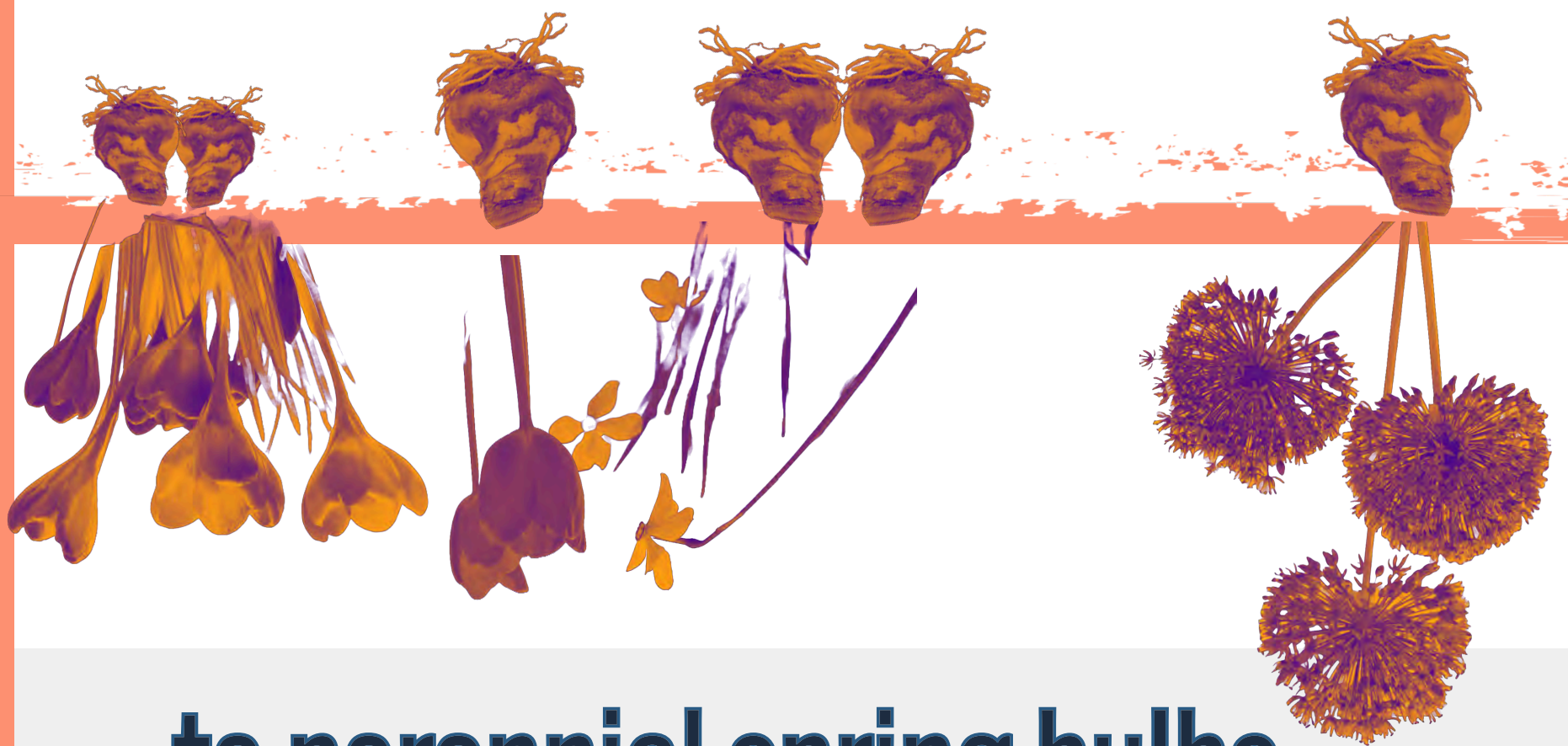


# the backyard guide



to perennial spring bulbs  
for months of **color**



the  
garden  
spot



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# welcome

This guide will introduce you to my favorite spring blooms for a succession of color, from the moment the ground thaws in spring until the herbaceous perennials take over in early summer.

I garden in the high plains and mountain west of North America, zone five. Our winters are cold and snowy, spring is temperamental (freeze-thaw), and summer is hot and dry. While these conditions might seem challenging in to garden in, it's actually the perfect environment for growing bulbs.

here are always exceptions, but most bulbs (daffodils, tulips, alliums, onions, garlic,) need a moist environment during active growth (spring and fall) and dry (or frozen) conditions when they are dormant (summer and winter). Growers in warm, rainy regions often find their bulbs rot during the winter or summer, forcing them to treat their bulbs as annuals.

Because bulbs don't generally do well in the kind of climates where many gardeners grow, they've gotten a bad reputation as finicky and expensive (which makes sense, if they are treated as annuals!)

But if you garden in a climate with cold winters and dry summers, you might just be lucky enough to grow the most trouble-free, easy-to-grow plants, spring bulbs.

Welcome to the wonderful world of spring bulbs.



hi there,

I'm Michelle from The Garden Spot. I'm no designer or master gardener. I don't have five acres or a legacy garden.

I started from scratch, between work, family and hobbies, to create my own backyard garden. Now I hope to help you dream yours.

# These spring ephemerals aren't just my favorite, they are also the ones that come back year after year.

This curated list only includes the bulbs that have perennialized in my garden bed.

They are the ones that come back year after year, reliably.

They are also the bulbs that bloom before the herbaceous perennials and shrubs wake up for the year, making them especially valuable to the northern gardener.

This list is organized based on bloom date so you can get a feel for what will bloom with what.

I also include non-bulb plant pairings that complement each other.



# late march-early april



## iris reticulata

Blooms in Late March or  
early April  
Full sun  
HZ: 5-9  
Height: 4" to 6"  
Color: White, blue, purple

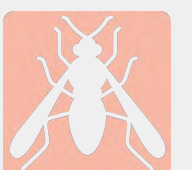
- PROS
- Deer and squirrel resistant
  - Very first bloom of the year
  - So whimsical!
- CONS
- Blooms are short-lived
  - Perennialized, but not naturalized\*
  - Only hardy to Z5

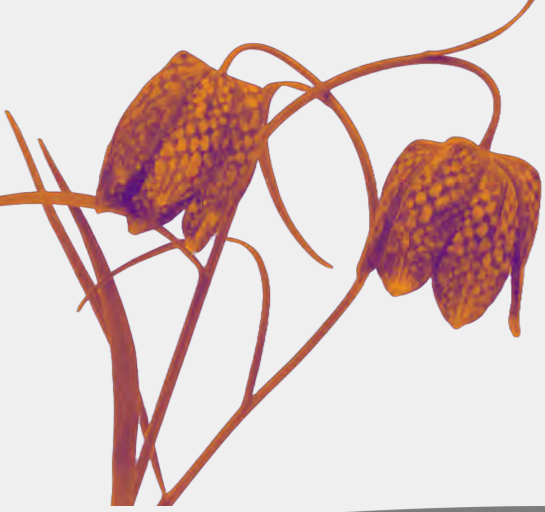


## crocus tommasinianus

PROS  
Cold hardy  
Look great with rock  
iris  
Long-lived  
CONS  
Squirrel food

Blooms in Late March or Early April  
Full sun  
HZ: 4-8  
Height: 4"  
Color: White, yellow, purple



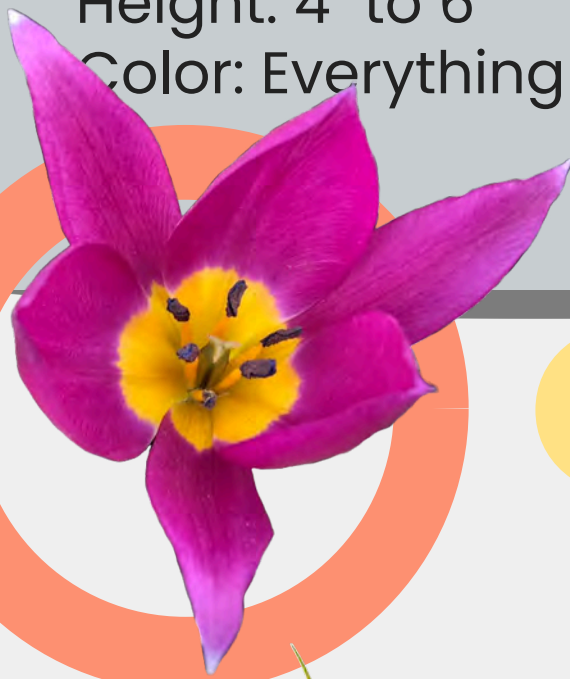


# mid-late april

## species tulips

Blooms in April  
Full sun to partial shade  
HZ: 4-8.  
Height: 4" to 6"  
Color: Everything but blue

PROS  
Cold hardy  
Easy to grow  
Not often grown  
CONS  
Squirrel food  
The foliage isn't very attractive



## narcissus; early

PROS  
Easy to grow  
Gorgeous  
Smells great  
Looks good massed  
CONS  
Foliage is difficult to hide

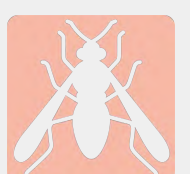


## fritillaria meleagris

Blooms in Late April  
Full to part sun  
HZ: 3-8  
Height: 6"  
Color: White and purple

PROS  
Uncommon  
Plays well with others  
Pretty seed heads  
Foliage disappears fast  
CONS  
Prefers moist soil

Additional April blooms: Scillia, Dutch crocus, and Grecian wind flower



# early may



## anemone blanda

Full to partial sunlight  
Blooms in May  
HZ: 5-9  
Height: 4"  
Color: White and purple

- PROS
- Gorgeous foliage
- One of the most beautiful blooms
- Plays well with other garden friends
- CONS
- One of the least cold-hardy plants on my list

## muscari armeniacum

PROS  
Cold hardy  
Resilient  
Long-lived  
CONS  
Can spread

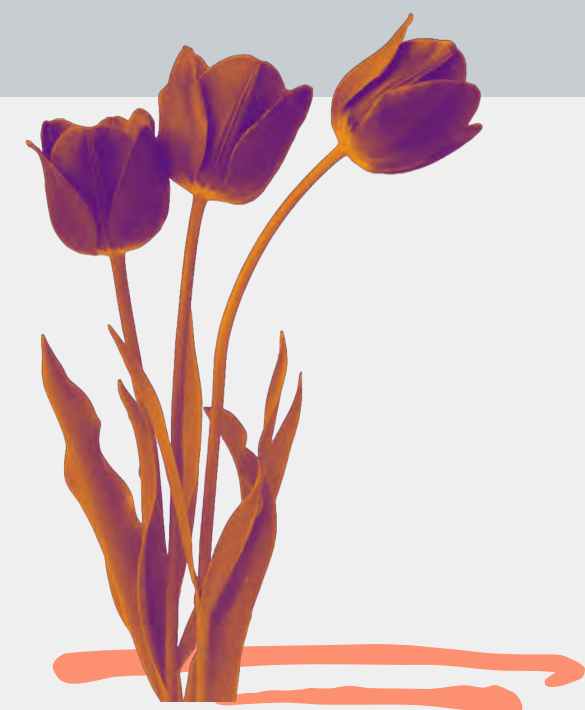
Blooms in Early May  
Full sun to part shade  
HZ: 4-8  
Height: 5"  
Color: White and purple



## tulipia; early

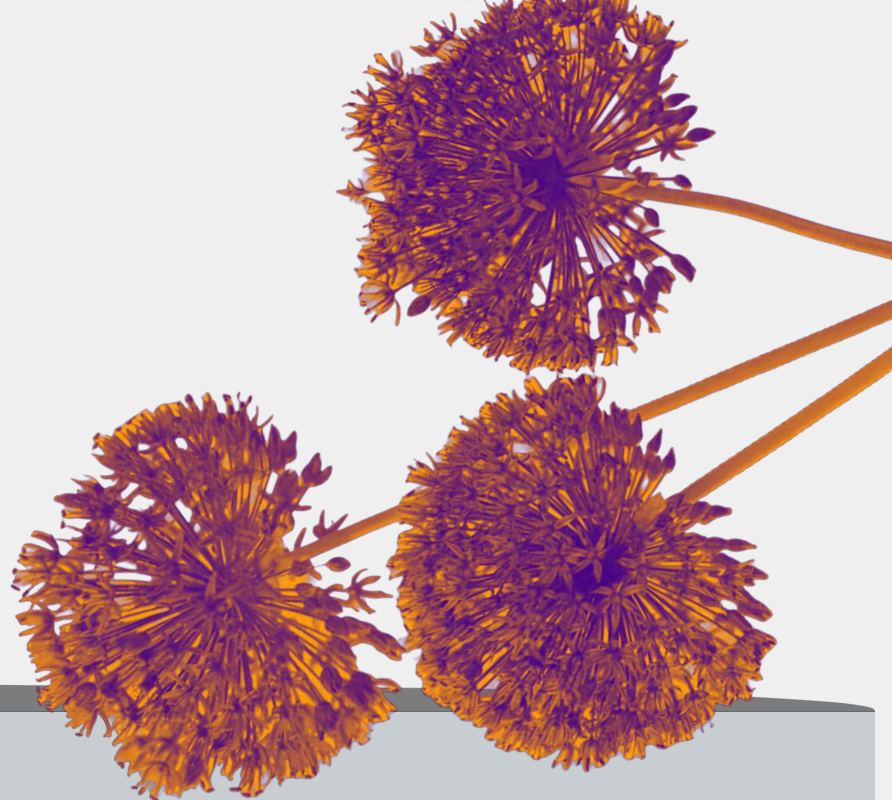
Bloom time varies from species  
Full sun to part shade  
HZ: 3-8  
Height: Varies  
Color: Anything but blue

PROS  
Incredible variety  
Screams spring  
CONS  
Not reliably hardy,  
especially in wet soils





# late may



## allium karataviense

Blooms in Late May  
Full sun  
HZ: 4-8  
Height: 1'  
Color: creamy white,  
deep red



### PROS

- Deer and squirrel resistant
- Long-lived
- easy to grow
- Better foliage than other alliums

### CONS

None. It's perhaps the perfect plant.



## allium christophii

### PROS

Cold hardy  
Easy to grow  
Massive, 10" blooms Long-lived

### CONS

Ugly foliage

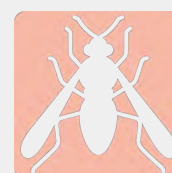
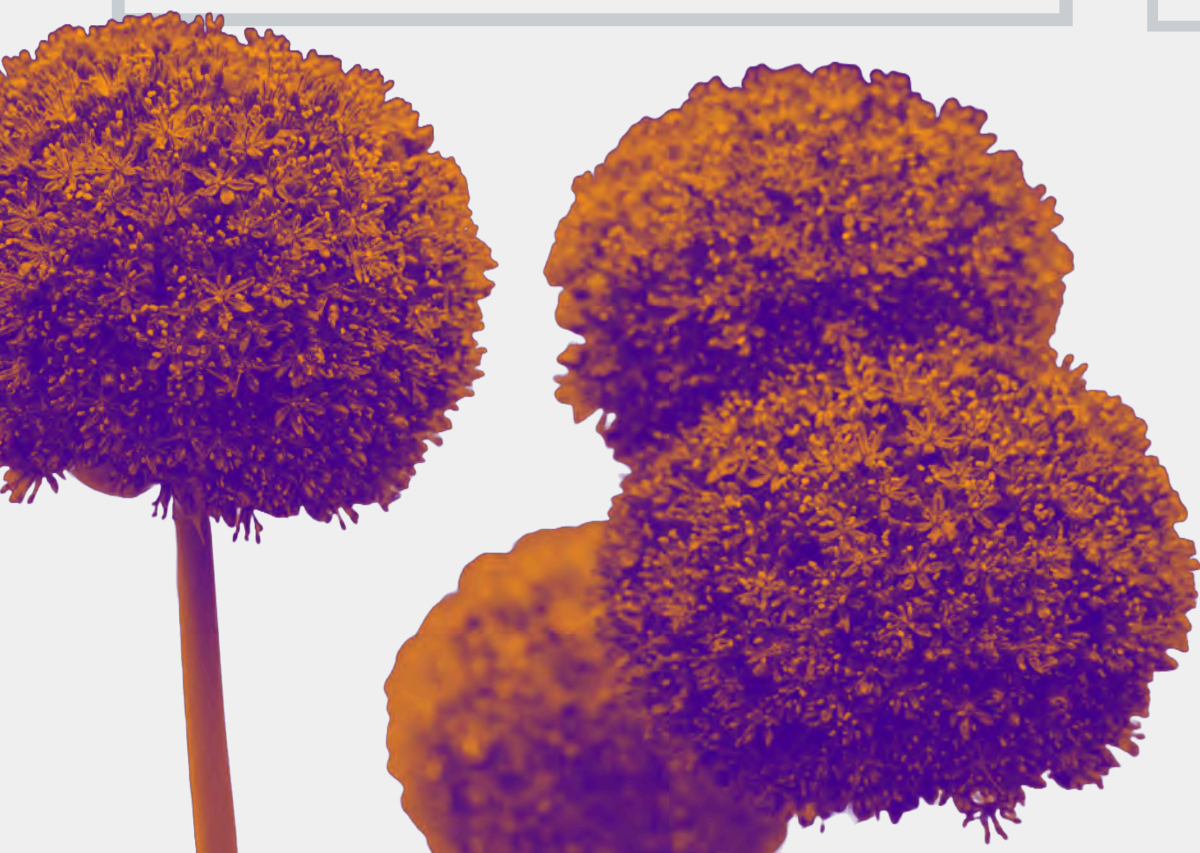
Blooms in Late May

Full sun

HZ: 4-8

Height: 1'

Color: metallic purple



# iris reticulata

*The very first bloom in my garden, and one of the best.*

Iris reticulata, or rock iris is a perennial bulb native to Turkey, the Caucasus, Northern Iraq and Iran. Like most bulbs, it doesn't like to be too wet during the summer. It might prefer soils lighter than mine, but it has perennialized in my heavy silt soil anyway.

There is a lot to love about this little guy. It's a charming early riser that is something different from your usual suspects. You can find it in colors from white to blue to purple and everything in between. And if you have squirrels, this is a great alternative for crocus, sharing a similar bloom period and height.

It doesn't seem to struggle to push up from my heavy mulch. Every spring I think it would look better if I removed some of the leaves, but reflecting back on its silhouette against dried leaves against the lushness of June makes me appreciate the contrast.

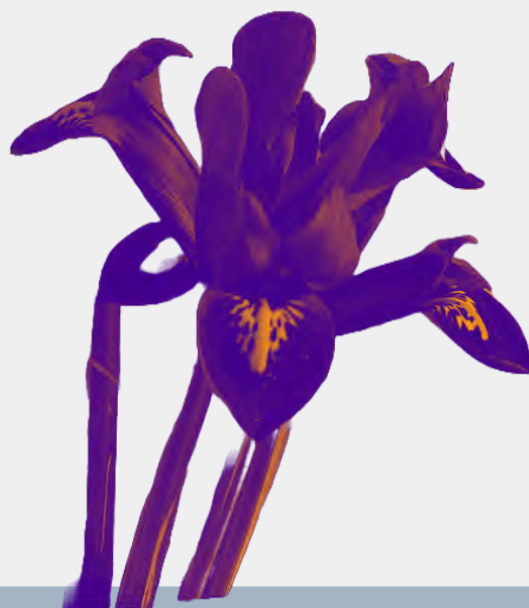
According to bulb sites it's a good naturalizer. But while it's become perennial in my dry front garden, I have yet to see it spread. Hopefully I'll be lucky enough to expand my patch of this lovely little bulb some day.

Rock iris prefers full sun to light shade and well-draining soil. It can be quite drought-tolerant once established but appreciates moisture during its growth and blooming period. Plant bulbs in the fall.

Iris reticulata is a zero maintenance bulb. Actually, that's what it prefers. Tidy gardeners beware, like all bulbs we have to let the foliage die back naturally instead of trimming it back. This allows the plant to store energy for the next growing season. I find that the foliage is so small and grass-like that it doesn't bother me. While it can tolerate a range of soil conditions, adding organic matter like compost can help improve its performance.

## Varieties to try

I. *'Clairette'* and *'Katharine Hodgkin'*



# snow crocus

*For northern gardeners, nothing is more exciting than the first signs of spring. These short-blooming beauties push the gardening season as early as late March.*

I don't know of anyone who doesn't love snow crocus, or crocus tommasinianus. I grow a few varieties, including 'Ruby Giant' and 'Lilac Beauty'. In Zone 4 gardens where rock iris refuse to grow, this variegated, grass-like foliage is often the very first sign of life. I love how their petals open and close to protect from frost and damage--they are like a little weather reflector that tells you whether or not it's currently nice outside. Not terribly helpful, but really, really cheerful.

Snow crocus have a wide natural range, appearing from Europe to North Africa to western Asia. Like most bulbs, they appreciate moisture while they are actively growing and flowering, but prefer to stay as dry as possible during the summer while the bulb is inactive. Like every flower on this list, crocus are ephemeral, meaning they will quickly flower, photosynthesize as fast as possible, and die back to the ground, ready to put on a show for next year. Let the foliage die back naturally if you want the bulb to remain healthy.

There is so much to love about crocus. From their lovely strappy foliage to their beautiful colors, they are really one of the best bulbs of spring.

And one of the tastiest.

Squirrels love these things. Apparently crocus tommasinianus is the least tasty to squirrels. I've heard of people trying everything to keep the buggers away, from cayenne pepper to chicken wire. My dogs keep a pretty close watch on the front yard, so even though it's not fenced in, they were able to keep the lil' guys out.

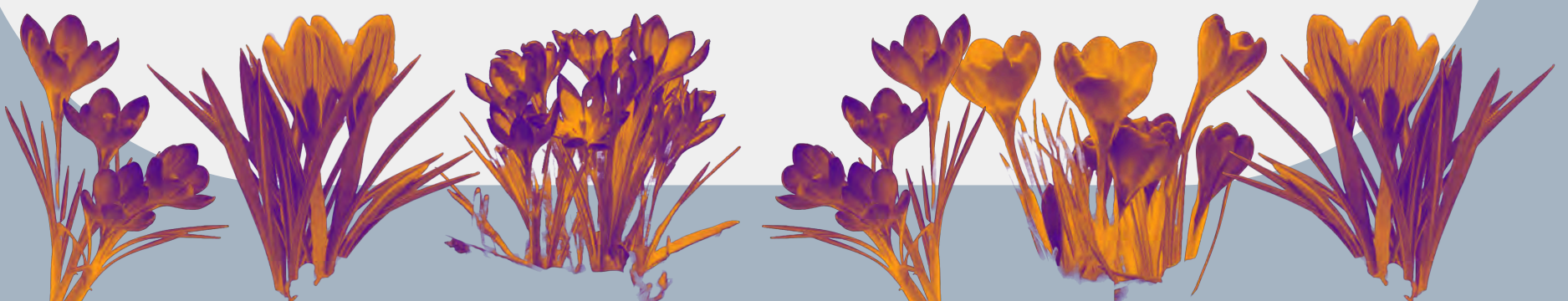
**TIP:** If you don't have a dog, try growing lavender, thyme, or other perennial herbs on top of them. I accidentally learned this trick with a different bulb on my list, tulips, last year. Imagine my surprise when I came out to the species tulip bed (species tulips are also apparently less tasty to deer, but my deer disagree) to find that every single tulip was gone, except for the ones tucked into my herbs.

I also grow large Dutch crocus, varieties *C. flavus* Golden Yellow, *C. vernus* Flower Record, *C. vernus* Grand Maitre, *C. vernus* Jeanne d'Arc and *C. vernus* Pickwick from Van Engelen. These crocus bloom later than *C. tommasinianus*. They are also larger and even tastier to squirrels. For their protection, they have a special place in the backyard, where my dogs Annie and Rango can keep the squirrels in check.

Unlike snow crocus, the foliage of Dutch crocus is larger and stays around longer. By June the snow crocus has been gone for weeks, where the foliage of the Dutch crocus is still vibrant and green. Consider planting these next to tall, warm-season grasses or other late-to-the-party perennials. You can use these plants to hide the foliage so it can die back naturally and peace.

## Varieties to try

*C. tommasinianus* 'Lilac Beauty' and *C. tommasinianus* 'Ruby Giant'



# species tulips

*Species tulips are wilder and hardier form of tulip.*

I love tulips. And because the dry gardens of the mountain west provide some of the best conditions for growing them, I so encourage you to toss out what you've heard about them being short-lived and add them to your garden.

But the species tulips, shorter in stature and much earlier to bloom, have a quiet resilience in their erect petals.

Species tulips refer to a handful of non-hybridized tulips. Or at least, it used to. On gaining popularity, cultivars have popped up to capture a lovely color or trait. But even the cultivars have a few similar traits:

Species tulips tend to be smaller in stature, bloom earlier, have grass-like foliage, and have a more reserved look to them.

While these tulips are likely to come back again and again, they are favored by deer and squirrels. I had read that the species tulips were less of a delicacy, but in my garden the deer enjoy them all the same.

**TIP:** Try planting species tulips in your perennial herb garden. Not only do they appreciate the same conditions as thyme, oregano, lavender, and chives, but if you leave the foliage on these plants until the tulips are finished blooming, the deer are less likely to take a bite.

## Varieties to try

*Tulipa humilis 'Persian Pearl'*

*Tulipa humilis 'Eastern Star'*

*For warmer gardens, try*

*Tulipa clusiana 'Lady Jane'*



# narcissus

*Common for a reason*

Daffodils are so common but so delightful. I'm partial to the white and peach varieties, but I do have some yellow early flowering varieties.

If you do grow daffodils, I recommend buying as many as you can afford to create huge swaths of them. By themselves they are gorgeous, but in a group they are truly something special. They smell great, too. To get the best price, look for wholesale growers. Pay attention to the bloom time, as early varieties can bloom in early April while later varieties won't bloom until mid-May in zone 5.

Narcissus is a genus of about 50 species, native to Europe and North Africa. Some smell amazing, others don't have a detectable scent.

If you do grow daffodils, I recommend buying as many as you can afford to create huge swaths of them. By themselves they are gorgeous, but in a group they are truly something special. They smell great, too. To get the best price, look for wholesale growers. Pay attention to the bloom time, as early varieties can bloom in early April while later varieties won't bloom until mid-May in zone 5.

They are easily grown in just about any soil type and perennialize well. One of the biggest appeals of daffodils, aside from their looks, is their hardiness and durability. Deer and rabbits leave them alone, they aren't fussy about soil (as long as it isn't wet), which makes them an excellent choice for many gardeners.

Daffodil care is relatively low-maintenance. After the daffodils have bloomed, don't cut off the leaves until they've yellowed and died back naturally, as they gather energy for the next year's blooms. Regular watering is usually not necessary unless there's a prolonged dry spell.

The biggest drawback of daffodils is figuring out how to hide the foliage in June, after the flowers are finished blooming. I've had moderate success by planting it with tall, native grasses like little bluestem.

There are various classes of daffodil, and some varieties are only hardy to zone 6. When purchasing, look for an early, mid, and late season variety hardy in your zone for full spring coverage.

## **Companions:**

*Try planting white, mid-season blooming varieties with muscari and lamb's ear. Try a yellow variety with anemone blanda.*

## **Varieties to try:**

*Trumpet Narcissus 'Mount Hood'  
Large Cupped Narcissus 'Stainless'  
Double Narcissi 'Cheerfulness'  
Triandrus Narcissus 'Thalia'  
Jonquilla Narcissus 'Pueblo'*



# fritillaria meleagris

*The weirdest and bestest bloom of spring.*

Snake's Head Fritillary, or *Fritillaria meleagris*, is a unique and captivating flowering plant native to Europe. It gets its common name from the checkered pattern on its bell-shaped flowers that some think resemble the skin of a snake.

The flower is striking, typically presenting in a checkered pattern in shades of purple, although there is a less common white variety as well. The pendulous, solitary flowers, which appear in spring, have a distinct bell shape that have a reported faint, musky scent, although I can't smell it.

Snake's Head Fritillary prefers a location in full sun to partial shade and thrives in rich, well-drained soil. It is often found growing in the wild in damp meadows and at the edges of water bodies, so it also appreciates moisture and can be a good candidate for areas of the garden that are a bit damp.

Try placing these bulbs in a moist or low area of the garden, or even under a downspout if you don't get too much rain.

That said, it doesn't seem to mind my somewhat dry garden. In its 3rd year, it looks like the spring rain appears to be enough to get it through. I don't expect it to ever naturalize my area like in Monty Don's moist garden, but I still appreciate it nonetheless.

Make sure to plant the corms out as soon as you receive them in the mail, as they can dry out fast.

## Companions:

*Try planting with muscari 'Valerie Finnis' and anemone blanda.*

*In a shadier area, pair with columbine, bellebores, and alpine for-get-me-nots*

## Varieties to try:

*F. meleagris is the only variety I've grown, but*

*F. imperialis is apparently a solid performer in wetter gardens.*



# anemone blanda

*Perhaps my favorite spring ephemeral, windflower is a spring must-have*

The Grecian windflower, *Anemone blanda*, is one of my favorite little perennials. It's in the buttercup family, Ranunculaceae. Native to southeastern Europe, Turkey, and Lebanon, this charming lil buddy thrives in well-drained, humus-rich soil and does well in full sun to partial shade. In my garden it seems to want some protection and prefers to be on the ground, rather than in my raised rock garden beds.

The leaves of the Grecian windflower are similar to the pasqueflower and geranium, and I really like them. But the real show are the tons of little daisy-like flowers in shades of white, pink, or rich blue, with a ring of prominent stamens at their center. The flowers are set against a backdrop of dark green, deeply cut foliage. On cloudy or snowy days the blooms remain tightly closed, waiting for better weather to open.

It's a great choice for woodland gardens, where it can be allowed to naturalize under trees or shrubs, or for the front of a border where its low-growing habit can be appreciated. I think it looks great with muscari or the thick, bold foliage of *allium karataviense*.

Bulbs (technically tubers) can be soaked in water overnight before planting in the fall, at a depth of about 2 inches. The tubers can be somewhat irregularly shaped, but don't worry too much about which side is up when planting; they will find their way to the surface.

The Grecian windflower requires zero care once planted. Just let the foliage die back naturally and enjoy for years to come. Apparently *A. blanda* can spread and naturalize, although it has yet to do so in my garden. (One can only hope!)

## Companions:

*Try layering with crocus and allium karataviense for coverage from early April to mid June.*



# allium karataviense

*Surprisingly elegant, delightfully restrained, my all-time favorite allium.*

Allium krataviense is my very favorite allium and probably in my top 5 favorite plants. It's been in cultivation since the 1800s, and is a low-growing heirloom with a steely, pale purple-pink glow, and broad, glaucous, blue-green foliage with thin red edges. The foliage looks alien when it first breaks ground in April.

Alliums are a large family of plants known for their striking, spherical blooms. There are over 700 different species of allium, which include not only ornamental garden varieties but also important culinary plants like onions, garlic, leeks, and chives.

Ornamental alliums are prized by gardeners for their tall, sturdy stems that hold up round clusters of small flowers, forming a globe-like shape that can range from tennis ball to soccer ball size, depending on the species and cultivar. The flowers typically bloom in late spring to early summer and come in various shades of purple, pink, and white. Their unique shape adds an architectural element to the garden and makes them excellent for cut flower arrangements.

One of the wonderful things about alliums is their resilience. They are resistant to deer and rodents, and they have few other pest or disease problems. They are also drought-tolerant once established.

## Companions

*Try pairing this allium with iris reticula, anemone blanda, and iris siberica. The foliage looks tired by July, so consider incorporating something that will be slow to get going in the spring but take off when warm weather hits. Natives like daisies and yarrow complement it well. I have mine under an aspen, and the color is striking against the white bark.*





# tulipa

*Rivaled only by daffodils, tulips feel like spring.*

Tulips, with their wide array of colors and forms, are a quintessential sign of spring. A member of the lily family, the tulip's genus, *Tulipa*, includes around 75 wild species and countless cultivars.

Growing tulips successfully involves understanding their native habitat and growing cycle. They originally come from a band stretching from Southern Europe to Central Asia, where the climates are typically cold in the winter, dry in the summer, and have long, cool springs – conditions that stimulate the tulip bulbs to break dormancy and grow.

Tulips are some of those plants where we dry, northern gardeners can really show off. They love our wet springs, brutally cold winters, and dry summers.

Tulips are perennial, but many of the larger and more showy hybrid varieties tend to peter out after a few years. If you want a perennial display, opt for species tulips or hardier varieties known for their perennial nature.

Tulips are a snack for deer, rabbits, and squirrels.

Most sources say that some varieties are more likely to be perennial than others. This includes...

Viridiflora (green) tulips  
Darwin hybrids  
Species tulips  
Emperor  
Greigii  
Kaufmanniana

## **Companions:**

*Tulips look great with daffodils and muscari, but to level up a display, try including a 6" ground cover like lamb's ear into the mix. This will help hide foliage that no longer looks fresh.*

## **Varieties to try:**

*Emperor Tulip 'Flaming Purissima'*  
*Darwin hybrid 'Blushing Impression'*  
*Kaufmanniana tulip 'Ice Stick'*  
*Greigii tulip 'Toronto'*  
*Viridiflora tulip 'Esperanto'*  
*Parrot tulip 'Black Parrot'*



# bloom chart

	VERY EARLY		MID SPRING	LATE SPRING		SUMMER		
	15-Mar	1-Apr	15-Apr	1-May	15-May	1-Jun	15-Jun	1-Jul
Reticulated iris								
Snow crocus			foliage					
Snow drops								
Winter aconite								
Scilla								
Dutch crocus								
Early daffodils				f	f			
Species tulips								
Frittilary								
Grecian wind flower					f	f	f	f
Mid-season daffodil					f	f		
Early tulips; emperor, kaufmanniana, greigii					f	f		
Late Daffodils						f	f	f
Hyacinth								
Muscari						f	f	f
Mid tulips; darwin						f	f	
Late tulips; parrot, lily fringed							f	f
Allium sensation							seed pod	s
Allium karata.			f	f				f
Cerastium	f	f	f	f				Cut back
Bearded iris								f
Dutch iris								f
Allium cristophii				f	f			
Lamb's ear	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	
Pussy toes	f	f	f	f	f	f	f	
Upright sedums		f	f	f	f	f	f	f
Pasque					s	f	f	f
Columbine								f

There are many spring bulb bloom guides out there, but I needed something that would be zone specific with dates (rather than early, mid, and late spring). I also wanted to know when foliage was present, as that is another factor of design.

A colored box denotes a bloom. "f" stands for foliage, meaning foliage is present. "s" stands for seed heads.

Use the chart above to plan a color palette and layer bulbs on top of each other so that you have a bulb display that lasts all year!

- Cerastium
- Reticulated iris
- Early daffodils
- Muscari
- Allium sensation
- Allium christophii
- Rudbeckia

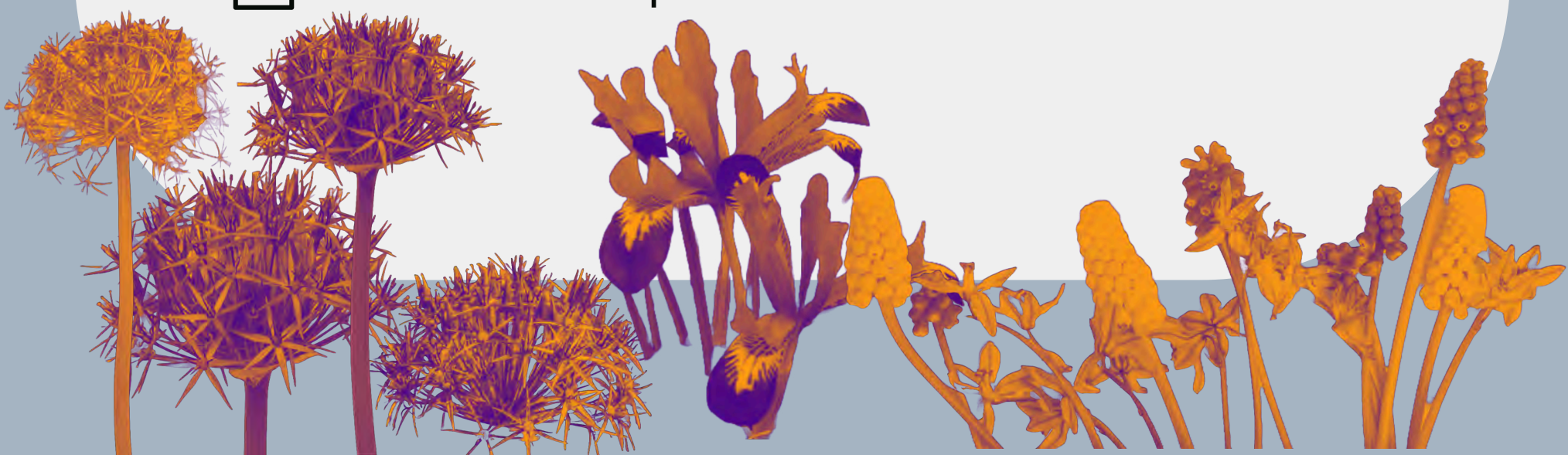
## sample pairings

- Creeping thyme
- Snow crocus
- Species Tulips
- Muscari
- Daffodils
- Allium karataviense
- Lavender

- Lamb's ear
- Reticulated iris
- Anemone blanda
- Muscari
- Late daffodils
- Allium christophii
- Coneflower

# sample bulb list

- Crocus tommasinianus* Lilac Beauty
- Iris reticulata* Clairette
- Tulipa humilis* Eastern Star
- Tulipa kaufmanniana* Ice Stick
- Tulipa greigii* Toronto
- Crocus vernus* Pickwick
- Anemone blanda* White Splendour
- Muscari armeniacum* Valerie Finnis
- Fritillaria meleagris*
- Allium karataviense*
- Narcissus miniature* Xit
- Narcissus* Stainless
- Narcissus* Thalia
- Narcissus* Mount Hood
- Allium aflatunense* Purple Sensation
- Tulipa Darwin* hybrid Apricot Impressions
- Tulipa viridiflora* Esperanto
- Iris* × *hollandica* Eye of the Tiger
- Allium siculum bulgaricum*
- Allium christophii*



**late march  
early april**



**this display of  
a full plant palette  
is here to help you  
envision what your  
garden might look like  
through spring**

**late april**

**early may**

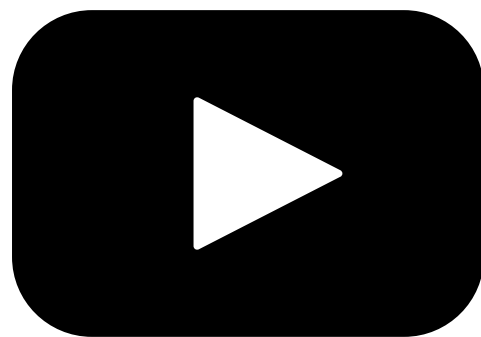
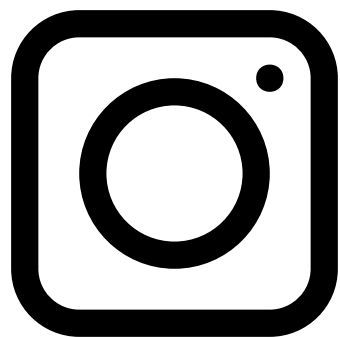
**late may**

**early june**





# the garden spot



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