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Tulip Basics

Origins. Tulips originated in Turkey getting their name from the Turkish word "tulbend" which means turban. Tulips were thought to look like the turbans. (Hats that were worn in Turkey at that time.) Most people mistakenly associate the origin of Tulips with Holland. Tulips were introduced to Holland from Persia.

Tulips are classified with perennials but often need to be treated as annuals. Dig up your tulip bulbs once the foliage has died & store them in a cool dry area for replanting in the fall. There are a wide variety of tulips; some are shown in the following figures.

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Order your bulbs early enough that they can spend anywhere from 8 to 10 weeks basking in the chill of your frig. Store them in a mesh bag so that they get good air circulation. If you are a fruit lover you may want to strongly consider getting a spare refrigerator – one of the minis so readily available. Fruit gives off ethylene gas – and ethylene gas will kill the flower inside your bulbs.

Planting. Choose your planting spot carefully. No open, sunny areas – and no Southern exposures. Find the coolest spots on your property – preferably those that are either in partial shade with only morning sun. Otherwise your poor plants will pop out and fry before you have a chance to admire them.

# Tulips prefer soil with reasonable drainage. While growing, they need to stay moist, but the roots should not stand in water. Do not feed tulips during the growing season, for this will yield 'leggy' plants. The best time to plant is from October until late December. Plant bulbs at least 4 inches deep, and 5 to 6 inches apart.

**Plant at the right depth**. Follow instructions for your climate as seen in Figure 7. Space them correctly. Set tulip bulbs 2 to 4 inches apart. Exception: When planting forget-me-nots, pansies, violas, or other flowers above the bulbs, plant the tulips 8 inches apart on center and the flowers 10 inches on center. If you are using one of the many available bulb planters be sure that the soil in the whole planting area is well worked to prevent any sitting water at the bottom of the hole made by the planter.



Figure 7 Planting Tulip Bulbs

Water well after planting, and often enough to keep the soil from drying out when there is a lack of rain. When stems emerge from the soil, water to keep the soil moist.

Tulip failures are mostly due to damage by slugs and snails. And squirrels enjoy digging up the bulbs for a tasty treat. Apply a slug repellant immediately after planting and repeat at monthly intervals until the plants stand well above the ground.

After Flowering. Remove withered flower heads (called deadheading), and let the plant die back before removing the bulbs. This time is when the food supply in the plant feeds the main bulb, which will produce next year’s flower. Dead foliage from tulips should be removed, and not composted. Tulip plants can leave a disease, 'tulip fire' as they die off in late spring.



Figure 8 Tulip Bulbs

Like other bulbs, Tulips should be stored in a cool, well ventilated area. The garage in summer is definitely not the place to keep tulip bulbs. Many inexperienced gardeners have pulled up bulbs and kept them in the garage until fall planting, only to find dried up bulbs a few months later.

Forcing Tulips. Tulips can be forced to bloom indoors during winter months. Plant a few bulbs in a flower pot and then chill the pot or set it in a cold room for 12 to 15 weeks. After the pot is brought indoors the tulips will grow and bloom.

Sources: http://www.americanmeadows.com/planting-flower-bulbs

Article in a Periodical: **A Westerner's Guide to Tulips** Sunset, Oct, 2018 by Lauren Bonar Swezey.

