

# In This Issue

<b>A Note From the Editor</b>	page 2
<b>News</b> - New Horticulture Card	page 9
Workshops	page 3
<b>Bulbs for Spring Cheer</b> - 3 Ways to Plant Bulbs This Fall	page 4
<b>What's Bugging You?</b> - A Tale of Two Caterpillars	page 5
<b>One of My Favorite Things</b> - <i>Danae racemosa</i>	page 7
<b>Sage Advice</b> - Amending Soil When Transplanting	page 8
<b>HortCuts</b> - A Quick Round Up of Horticultural News	page 10
<b>Destinations</b> - Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens	page 11

If you would like to submit an article to *The Real Dirt*, [click here](#) or visit the Horticulture Committee's landing page in the Members Area of the GCA website to fill out the submission form. Questions? [TRD@gcamerica.org](mailto:TRD@gcamerica.org)



## WORKSHOPS! Dig In and Win!

Let's grow together! Over the next few months, we invite you to organize a bulb forcing workshop in your club and then share your results with the GCA. Growing bulbs indoors is easy and fun. You can read more about bulb forcing in the "Bulbs for Spring Cheer" article in this issue, and record your methods on the new horticulture propagation card featured on page 9. To participate simply send us pictures this fall of your bulb workshops. Then send us a final photo of your forced bulb pots on April 1, 2019 (No foolin'). Send us those final photos (whether or not your pots are in bloom) along with the name of your club email to: [TRD@gcamerica.org](mailto:TRD@gcamerica.org). We'll feature the best individual entry (one pot in photo) and the best group/club entry (more than one pot in the photo) in a future issue of *The Real Dirt*. Have fun and GOOD LUCK! For more info on bulbs: [daffodilusa.org](http://daffodilusa.org)

Many thanks to our contributing photographers:

Anne Green - Greenwich Garden Club  
Gaby Hall - Green Fingers Garden Club  
Suzy Malloch - Hortulus

On the cover: *Russula emetica* Mushroom. Photo by Anne Green, Greenwich Garden Club

# Bulbs for Spring Cheer

With Labor Day come and gone, and hints of fall in the air, our thoughts run to spring and flowering bulbs. Now is the time to buy the bulbs of *narcissus*, tulips and hyacinths as well as smaller bulbs such as crocus, *muscari* and *chionodoxa* to plant in the garden in the cooler soil temperatures of late September through October. But perhaps, if you live in the colder regions of the country, you also want to have a colorful indoor display of spring flowers during February or pots of bright tulips on your Easter table.

**The bulbs you buy from catalogs or garden centers should be hard, clean, and feel heavy in the hand.**

Plant in the garden in groups to achieve a naturalistic effect and avoid planting in straight lines. Nearly all bulbs need spring sunlight and all of them dislike wet soil, and that includes areas reached by a watering system.

**The term "forcing" sounds harsh but in horticultural terms it means persuading plants to come into flower well before their natural time of bloom.** Hyacinth, daffodils, and tulips are the most commonly forced bulbs and less likely to present problems. For tulips try T.'Apricot Beauty', and T. 'Christmas Dream'. All hyacinth cultivars force nicely, and for daffodils, tried and true cultivars include N. 'Ice Follies', N. 'Mount Hood', N. 'Jack Snipe' and N. 'Rapture'.

**The ideal container for potting up bulbs for forcing is about 6" deep and 6"-8" across with a drainage hole in the bottom.** Shallower 6" deep pots require less soil in them and will not hold so much water that could cause bulbs to rot. Clay pots are less harmful to the environment, but dry out faster than plastic ones, so more frequent monitoring of moisture level is needed. In mid to late October, using store purchased

potting soil, pot up bulbs, 6-8 bulbs per pot depending on size of pot and bulbs.

**Water well and put the pots somewhere cool where they will not freeze and thaw during the winter but will stay cold enough for the 13-15 weeks of cold treatment required for bloom. In northern climates, a cold garage or patio with the temperature between 33F-40F will be just right.**

Cover the pots with an upturned plant pot to keep out mice and check periodically to make sure the soil is damp but not wringing wet.



**By 13-15 weeks the bulbs should be well rooted and have leaves 1"-2" tall.** The leaves may be white due to lack of chlorophyll but will green up in daylight.

**Water pots well and bring into a moderately warm sunlit spot to start the forcing process. Ideal temperature is 55F-60F.**

Within 2 to 3 weeks you should have flowers.

Keeping the pots relatively cool, especially at night, will prolong bloom for 10 days or more. Large outdoor pots of layered spring bulbs will add a colorful touch of early spring to the front door or patio. Plant up pots starting with daffodils at the bottom, tulips mid-layer and top with crocus bulbs. N. 'Ginter's Gem' or N. 'Silver Smiles', T. 'Helmar' and C. 'Flower Record' make an attractive mix. The pots should be stored for the winter in a cold garage or sunporch which does not freeze until mid-March or until the deep freeze has passed. Check every few weeks to make sure the soil is damp. Put outdoors when crocus shoots are beginning to show color.

**All the bulbs, except tulip bulbs, may be planted in the garden after flowering.** Allow the foliage to die down and allow bulbs to dry out in a shed or garage and store for fall planting or plant outside in spring when soil is workable.

Jennifer Brown  
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