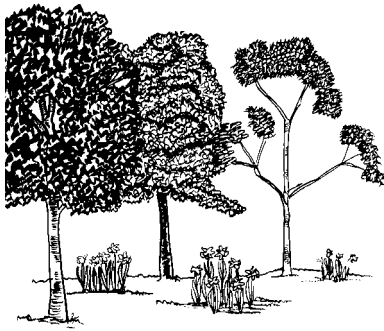


Naturalising Bulbs

Naturalising – what does this really mean?

It's great piece of jargon used by the bulb trade. It means planting bulbs with the intention of leaving them in the ground for several years (or indefinitely) to multiply naturally and flower year after year. Some bulbs naturalise readily, while others are not suitable.



Common places for naturalising bulbs are the areas of the garden that do not get disturbed often, such as beneath trees or in grassy areas.

Planting for naturalising

Bulbs planted to be left in the ground are treated in the normal way with one main exception: they need to be given more space than usual, to allow room for their increase by bulb division and ensure that they all get enough nutrients from the soil in the future.

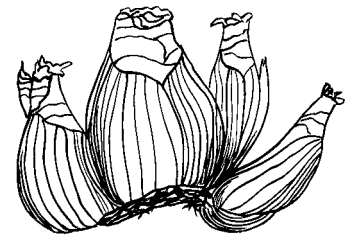
To achieve a truly "natural" look, many people scatter the bulbs and then plant them where they land to create random patches.



Care of naturalised bulbs

As most naturalising is done beneath trees or shrubs, some fertilising may be needed as the tree or shrub roots will compete strongly for moisture and nutrients. The correct time to fertilise is just after flowering, as this is when the bulbs will be building up strength for the next season.

After many years, it may be necessary to dig and split the bulbs if they are becoming too crowded and flowering poorly. This should be done in summer when the bulbs are dormant.



Bulbs for naturalising in shade or semi shade

Most naturalising is done in shade or semi shady areas of the garden, usually in wilder areas at the edge of the main garden. For these positions, daffodils, bluebells, leucojum, erythronium and crocus are good bulbs to naturalise. Daffodils need more sun than the others but will tolerate partial shade. For cultivation notes see Fact Sheet No. 9, which covers bulbs for damp and shady areas; and No. 7, which covers daffodil growing.

Bulbs for naturalising in dry areas

While not commonly thought of as areas in which to naturalise bulbs, dry areas are great for the right bulbs. They can be left undisturbed beneath hedges or against houses to provide unexpected colour from difficult areas. Alliums, babiana, brodiaea, ixia, sparaxis and tritonia are all suitable for dry areas. For cultivation notes see Fact Sheet No. 8, which covers bulbs for dry areas.

Bulbs for naturalising in regular garden areas

Aside from the extremes of shade and dryness, many bulbs naturalise readily in our typical garden areas, enjoying regular rain and full sunshine. These bulbs include Dutch irises, muscari, freesias, daffodils and lachenalia.