

## TIMING YOUR FLOWERS

One of the most common questions we are asked is how to make your bulbs flower for a specific time. Usually the question arises when people are planning for a wedding or other event to be held in a garden and want to have a good display of flowering bulbs at the right time.

It's also the most difficult question to answer; in fact, it's pretty well impossible for us to answer accurately.

What we can tell you falls into two main categories, for spring flowering and summer flowering bulbs.

We hope this explains this complex issue for you, so when we seem to be avoiding the question, you can see that it is largely up to nature.

### Spring flowering bulbs

To make them flower later, you can't just plant them later. These bulbs require winter chilling in the soil and have to be planted by late May. Planting them in March or in May makes little difference to the final flowering time, as it is more dependent on how cold the winter is, how much rain there is, and how quickly it becomes warmer in spring. It is also dependent on where you are in New Zealand. While we have good experience of when the different bulbs flower for us, we can only make a guess about what is normal for your area.

The only way you can make them later than normal is to plant them in pots and then hold them in a chiller, progressively lowering the temperature from 9° C to zero degrees C over a period of 10 weeks. Then hold them at zero and take them from the chiller 2-3 weeks before you want them in full flower.

To make spring flowering bulbs flower earlier, you can use the chilling method above, and simply take them out early rather than late. A minimum of 12 weeks total chilling is needed, so you can't have them flowering in May.

It's a little difficult to do this type of chilling at home however, it's really a commercial activity and this is how we produce flowering potted hyacinths and daffodils in the winter months.

You can also get your spring flowering bulbs to flower slightly earlier by placing the bulbs in the chiller just as they are, unplanted. This has to be done at about 4° C. Do this in late March and then plant them out in late May. The bulbs will think they have had a winter and will come into growth earlier, flowering about 3-4 weeks ahead of normal.

### Summer flowering bulbs

Summer flowering bulbs are a little bit easier to manipulate, as they do not require the cold period to trigger their flowering, they've usually already had a natural cool period of rest during the winter, before planting in spring.

Lilies and gladioli can be planted from August right up to Christmas if you can keep the bulbs in good condition up to that time. The eventual difference in flowering time will not be as great as the variation in planting time from July to December. This is because soil and growing conditions are cold at the start of this period and bulbs planted at that time will progress much more slowly than bulbs planted later when it is warmer.

Nevertheless, planting from July to December will see a succession of flowering over probably 2-3 months.

Dahlias are always a good bet for summer colour as they flower continuously over a period of 4-5 months, guaranteeing a good garden display any time from mid-December to the end of April.