**A Guide to Planting**  
Flowering Bulbs and Peonies  
In Warm Climates  
By Marde Gardner Ross

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Peonies are arguably the world’s favorite flower and have been grown for two thousand years. They originated in China and Europe and their images are found on all types of art, textiles, and porcelain as well as in gardens. Their earliest use was as medicinal as their roots, leaves, flowers and seeds are useful.

As beautiful flowers go, they are among the easiest and most reliable to grow once they are established. All they need is good irrigation and well-drained soil and sun, with filtered or afternoon shade in hotter climates.

Hundreds of varieties exist with more being hybridized yearly. As to form, there are tree peonies, shrub (herbaceous) peonies, and Itoh varieties that are newer. There is also variety within the major groups with yellows appearing in the tree peonies and Itoh varieties with prices sometimes in the hundreds of dollars.
Mild Climate Peony Growing:
Peonies grown in California and mild climates will never grow as large and lush as the ones found in the cold, northern states nor will the blooming season last as long. However, they can be successfully be grown in milder climates by following a few guidelines and selecting the varieties best suited to the warmer temperatures. Early doubles and Japanese singles are the best choice for mild or warm climates.

The basic concept of mild climate growing is that shallow planting will allow colder to penetrate to the roots and buds. Peonies that have not bloomed are generally planted too deeply. Some shade will prolong the bloom. Early double peonies and Japanese singles will open before it gets too hot. Too much heat can prevent the buds from opening.

Soil Preparation:
Dig and looses the soil to the dept of about 18” in cold climates and about 14” in warmer climates. Add amendments such as humus, compost, peat moss, crushed rock, and mix together well. Clay soil should be well amended as the plants will live for many, many years and can remain in the same place indefinitely. They will grow larger each year and can be divided in the fall if you wish. Peonies prefer a neutral to slightly acidic soil.

Planting:
The plants can be positioned in the soil with the pink or white buds about 2” below the surface in cold climates where they are most often found. In California and in mild or warm climates they should be planted right at the surface of the soil with the buds covered with
about ½” of soil so that they are not visible. In the warmer areas, they need as much cold as they can get rather than being protected from it by more soil covering them.

When the red shoots emerge in the spring you are only a few weeks from having flowers. Ants will appear on the buds and should not be sprayed off; they will disappear before the buds open.

As the buds begin to show color they can be cut and held in the cooler or used immediately if desired. However, cutting stems of peonies in the first year or two will deprive the roots of food when they die back and return to dormancy.

I have found that approximately 2/3 of the plants I have in my California garden bloomed the first year following their planting. In subsequent years, they add a flower or more each year.

Fertilizing:
Peonies do not need fertilizer ordinarily. If you wish to add nutrients, then you can mulch with compost keeping it slightly away from the stems in the ground. If compost is not available, a granular fertilizer higher in phosphate and potassium than nitrogen can be scratched into the soil around the crown in early spring and fall.

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Disease:
I have found that if a bud or two dries up rather than opening, that cutting them off and leaving the plants alone until the next season takes care of the problem as I don’t use any spray on my peonies. There are more serious problems that would require removing the
plant or spraying with fungal remedies, but I have never had any of those problems.

**Container Culture:**

Plant one peony root in a single pot preferably over 14" in diameter. My peony pictured in *Sunset Magazine’s* article (October 1993) is planted in an 18" container, which is 12" deep. Again, the buds are planted only 1" beneath the soil surface. Keep well watered. (See also, *Sunset Magazine*, September, 1996, and October, 1998). In the first year, I have found that *approximately 2/3 of the* bushes I have planted generally bloom with at least one flower, sometimes two and increase in number each year if the planting site or container is suitable.

Plant one peony root in soil that is neutral to slightly acidic and in a pot preferably over 14” in diameter. Keep the peony well watered during the growing season and do not allowed the pot to dry out.

The herbaceous peonies that I sell in the fall are the following with other being added as they are developed:

**Single or Japanese:**
- Doreen
- Gay Paree
- Bowl of Beauty

**Semi-Double:**
- Westerner
- Coral Supreme
- Coral Charm
- Coral Sunset
Coral Fay
Paula Fay
Cheddar Surprise,

**Bomb:**
Charlie’s White
Duchess de Nemours

**Fully Double:**
Carol
Mrs. F.D. Roosevelt
Henry Bockstoce
Festiva Maxima
Sarah Bernhardt
Edulis Superba
Princess Margaret
Gardenia
Mr. Ed

**Double Bomb:**
Red Charm
Mons Jules Elie
Raspberry Sundae
**TULIPS**

*Blushing Beauty – Single Late Tulip*

*These make great landscaping statements and are tall for cutting*

Tulips come in a variety of colors, heights and shapes. Early tulips are generally shorter than those, which bloom in late March and early April (in California, tulips bloom up to a month ahead of the time indicated in standard bulb books). Species tulips are as short as one foot while single late tulips (formerly cottage) and some lily flowered tulips can grow to almost three feet. “French Tulips” are single late varieties grown on a second year, (their blooms are cut off and thrown away just before they open to make the bulb grown larger!).

**Refrigerate Tulip Bulbs in California and Mild Weather Areas:**
Refrigerate the tulips for 6-8 weeks in refrigerator, **not in the freezer.** Store in paper bags to allow for air circulation. Do not store with apples as they give off a gas that inhibits tulips growth.

**Culture:**
Prepare the soil well and work in compost to a depth of one foot or more. Bulbs should be planted 4-6 inches deep and about the same distance apart measuring from the center of the bulb. The pointed end is planted up. They should be planted in graceful drifts or
clumps rather than stiffly in rows. Taller varieties can be planted behind the shorter types for extended bloom and pleasing effect. I plant my tulips rather shallowly in California so that I can just pull them out immediately and throw them away.

**Over Planting:**
Tulips emerging from forget-me-not, violas, alyssum or other shorter annuals are particularly attractive. Seeds can be sown or young plants placed over the bulbs. The annuals add interest and color. If left in the ground, only about 20% of tulips will re-bloom but as they divide after blooming, the next year’s blooms, if any, will be small.

**Potted Tulips:**
In containers, tulips should be crowded and almost touching when planted, then covered with two inches of soil, watered well and allowed to root in a cool, shady place in the yard. At least 4" of soil beneath the bulbs is required for root growth and moisture retention. Pots should be kept well watered. In general, the same variety will bloom earlier in pots than in the ground.

The Parrot Tulips (Apricot pictured above) are showy and wonderful for cutting, painting, admiring and their color variations are beautiful.
My Favorite
TULIPS BY BLOOMING TIMES

SPECIES
Candy Stick

TRIUMPH
Apricot Beauty, Atilla, New Design, White Dream

DARWIN HYBRIDS
Apeldoorn, Daydream, Golden Apeldoorn

LILY FLOWERING
Mariette, White Triumphator, Marjolein

PARROT
Apricot Parrot, Blue Parrot, Estella Rijnveld, Fantasy, Texas Gold, Green Wave

DOUBLE LATE
Angelique, Mt. Tacoma

SINGLE LATE
Blushing Beauty, Blushing Bride, Ernesto Cardinal Magier, Maureen, Menton, Oullioules, Perestroika Pink Diamond, Pink Impression, Queen of Night, Renown, Sorbet, Temple of Beauty
DAFFODILS

Culture:
Daffodils come in many colors and forms and have identical planting requirements.

Soil Preparation:
Dig and loosen the soil to the dept of about 12”. Add amendments like humus, compost, peat moss, crushed rock, and mix together well if desired, but daffodils will also do well on hillsides where such preparation is not needed.

Planting:
They should be planted with about 6” of soil above the top of the bulb (which is planted pointed end up) and in clumps of 5-7 for a natural look. Golden Dawn should be planted about 6” on center apart, as they will increase each year.

After planting, the bulbs should be well watered. Fertilize when top growth shows to strengthen growth potential for future years. If the bulbs are to be discarded after bloom, fertilizer is unnecessary. Each bulb has enough food for vigorous bloom in the current season. I do not fertilize my hillsides as it is unfeasible.

Timing of Bloom:
There are two factors that can influence the blooming times of Narcissi and Daffodils planted at the same time. If the bulbs are chilled, they will bloom 1-3 weeks earlier than the unchilled bulbs. This is useful in hot areas such as Southern California when early, warm springs can shorten normal blooming times. The other factor that can hasten bloom is a shallower planting depth. If bulbs are both chilled and planted shallowly, their blooming time is doubly hastened.

Sunset Magazine conducted an experiment a many years ago and, using chilled and unchilled bulbs and 3” and 6” planting depths,
managed to keep “Thalia” blooming sequentially for 4 1/2 weeks whereas the normal duration of bloom is about 2 weeks. Potted Daffodils produce earlier bloom than those planted in the garden.

After Blooming:
Daffodils and Narcissi have to be allowed to die back naturally in order to rebuild the bulb. If this is to be allowed, fertilizer should have been applied during growth and bloom. The foliage should not be braided together as this crushes the cells that continue to feed the bulb while dying back. Pots can be hidden in less visible parts of the garden until late July, then stored in cool, dry conditions. In the fall, after chilling, if desired, the bulbs can be replanted in fresh soil or in the garden.

Daffodils Blooming Times by Type

**Very Early:** Tazettas, Paper Whites

**Early:** February Gold, Peeping Tom, Tete a Tete

**Early Mid-Season:** Golden Dawn, Dutch Master, Trevithian, Fortune,

**Mid-Season:** Actaea, Ice Follies, Scarlet O’Hara. Jet Fire, Mount Hood, Pink Charm

**Late Mid-Season:** Unsurpassable, Salome, Thalia

**Later:** Cheerfulness, Yellow Cheerfulness, White Lion

The selection by season is somewhat irrelevant in California and warm climates. Because of our beautiful weather, we often have many varieties overlapping except for the extremes. The list above is my experience just north of San Francisco.
How to Plant and Maintain Your Own Daffodil Hill

The best kind of setting for a planting of daffodils is a hillside or undulating land or meadow. The slope of a hillside immediately removes the threat of poor drainage and resulting rotting bulbs even in rocky, clay soil. The flatter meadow should have nice, deep soil with good drainage so that heavy rain will not pool on the surface. Avoid planting in the depths of a swale as well. In order to estimate how many bulbs to use, I generally plant about 3, 5, and 7 top sized, bulbs in clumps about 24” apart depending on their size. Groups of little daffodils would be planted closer together than larger, taller varieties. All can be scattered as well if desired although if they don’t propagate themselves, it would look unnatural to see one or two planted together. This technique (classically throwing out baskets of daffodils and planting them where they lie) is more appropriate to England or wherever else has cold winters and they spread. If possible, sites should have some natural interest such as a stream or woodland so that the daffodils can be scattered naturally over the area. Daffodils streaming into or out of woodland are a lovely sight. A meandering path amid the daffodils or alongside them gives further interest.
Which Daffodils to Use?

The large trumpet daffodils such as Dutch Master, Unsurpassable, and others may not be as long lived as Mediterranean types such as Thalia, a Triandrus type or Trevithian which is a Jonquil type with grassy foliage rather than the straps of the classic daffodils. They are both fragrant and will return reliably in future years. They are used in warm weather areas, and are called “naturalizing” in some areas of the southern United States as they re-bloom in following years.

Pleasing Mix:

I have found a pleasing combination to be Scarlet O’Hara, Ice Follies, and Salome with some Flower Record added. The later ones extend the blooming time. The colors of the three are yellow with orange cup, white with flat yellow cup which fades to cream, and white with a yellow/peach trumpet becoming more peach with age then fading.

If tall, green grass is present, the area can be mowed before the bulbs are planted and again before they begin to emerge. The daffodils will generally grow faster than the grass and not be obscured by it so they can be planted on a dried out meadow or hillside.

Planting:

Dig a hole about 9-12” deep or deeper if the ground is flat and plant a group of about 5-7 with the bulbs about 1 ½ inches apart, not touching.

Cover with the excavated earth and move to the next hole. The fall rains will take care of the moisture and they will rest happily until they receive moisture with which to start their growth.

In order to have the bulbs re-bloom in following years, they should receive no summer water and be allowed to die back naturally.
often see articles about how to tie up or braid the straps to make them more attractive, but these procedures break the capillaries and impede the photosynthesized food in the leaves from being reabsorbed by the bulbs. As the field grasses grow they will cover the drying daffodil foliage and it will soon be unnoticeable. If the foliage is cut back too soon, the bulbs will lose vigor.

An area can develop bare patches from poor drainage, I often find it difficult to remember where that “patch” was, so taking a photograph aids the memory and more of that variety can be added the next year if desired.

**Amounts of Daffodil Bulbs:**
One acre planted solidly with a cluster of 5-7 bulbs every 1 ½ square feet could take up to 124,000 bulbs. Planting some clusters farther apart in places looks more natural and would cut down the number of daffodils. Any number can be planted and some settings require only a few clumps to get the desired effect.

**Wonderful Bonus!!!**

Deer and gophers find daffodils distasteful, even poisonous and will not touch them from above or below so they are an ideal woodland addition.

**In order of bloom, I have found the following sequence to be fairly reliable:**

- February Gold and Tete a Tete
- Dutch Master, Scarlet O’Hara, Jet Fire (small), Ice Follies
- Golden Dawn, a hybrid, has a very long blooming season and is will increase
- Trevithian
- Unsurpassable
- Thalia, Salome Cheerfulness, Yellow Cheerfulness, White Lion
Saffron is a precious spice that is mainly grown in Iran, India, Spain, Greece, Italy, Pakistan, Morocco, and central Asian countries. Until recently, saffron was perceived only for its value as a spice. However, with recent research findings pointing to the medicinal properties of saffron such as its antimicrobial, anti-carcinogenic and antioxidant effects, interest in this plant has increased.

Culture:
Plant the corm 4 inches deep and 2 inches apart with the pointed side of the corm facing upward. Water well at planting time. The corms need to go dry over the summer, then water when they start to show green sprouts. They can be planted when they are sprouted with no harm to the bulb, but may delay the bloom for a season.

To Harvest: The three orange threads can be clipped and saved for cooking. It takes 70,000 blooms to make one pound of the spice – the most expensive in the world.
GLORIOSA LILY

Gloriosa Lily - Rothschildiana
Originally from Africa, Gloriosa lilies are beautiful, easy to grow, and will multiply. They are a splendid low climber, easy to grow. Grows 5-6 feet high, producing many lily-like flowers of exceptional beauty over an extended period, are suitable for potting and are long lasting cut flowers. If the flower vines are not cut, the tubers will double and they are perfectly adapted to our area. They will take full sun, good drainage. Water well while growing and provide something to climb on like walls, fences, trellises. Lay long tubers flat and cover with 4” of soil.
LILIES

Lilies are versatile in the garden and in pots and they follow the general bulb bloom in the spring with a burst of color. The Asiatic Hybrids bloom during May and June in Northern California and Oriental types bloom in July and August if planted in the winter. Later planting will result in later bloom and I had Oriental Lilies blooming in October one year when I didn’t plant them until July. Of course, they need to be kept in the refrigerator until they are in soil.

Lilies will grow well in full sun, part shade, and full shade if their heads can reach into the sun. They can be planted in flowerbeds or amid small shrubs such as azaleas. They are nicely highlighted by dark backgrounds. Moist, shaded roots are the best environments one can give. To perform beyond a single year’s bloom, they cannot have invasive roots from other plants and trees nearby and must have excellent drainage, water and regular fertilizer. Cutting weakens the bulbs and they may not re-bloom the following year.

Planting and Fertilizing
To plant the bulbs, prepare the bed well with organic additives and soil amendments to make drainage excellent and easy to work. Compost is an excellent additive. Work in a complete fertilizer at the time of planting. Mulch with compost or leaves mixed with well-rotted manure to limit weeds. Set the bulbs 6” deep and about 6” apart between centers. Fertilize as growth emerges. After bloom, let the lilies dry back naturally until the stems are a dry, yellow/brown then cut them. Mulching with compost is advisable.

Container Grown Lilies
Bulbs should be planted 4-6" deep to allow for stem rooting. One medium size bulb can go into a 6" pot and three into a 9" pot. Large tubs can hold many lilies and make effective displays. Weekly feedings with water-soluble fertilizer are necessary in containers.
ANEMONES

There are four solid colors in the grouping of corms called Anemones and both single and double varieties. In addition, there are mixtures of the singles and doubles.

Culture
Anemones should be planted in clusters or used en mass for borders as they are long lasting and supply excellent cutting flowers as well as landscaping interest. The most vigorous corms will each produce over 20 flowers and the blooming period in California is from late January through April if they are planted in September or October so the foliage can get established.

Prepare the soil well with organic additives such as compost to loosen the soil. Plant the corms point down about 1 1/2 inches deep and 4 inches apart. The two varieties are a little different shape, but the pointed end goes down and the rounded end up. If in doubt, they can be planted on their sides and they will find their way up without a loss of vigor. Water well after planting but never let them sit in waterlogged soil, as they require good drainage. Winter rains will do most of the work once they begin.

Cutting
Anemones should be cut when they are about to open for best results. They will last for many days and the corms will produce enough to enhance both the garden and the house. As cut flowers, they are very thirsty and need water replenished frequently to prolong their bloom. There is something very special about a corm that is among the first and last to bloom in the spring, cuts well and re-blooms!

After Bloom
Let the corms die back. If possible, let them go without water during July and August to prepare for other seasons of showy flowers.
AMARYLLIS

The large Amaryllis bulb will produce vibrant blooms with little effort. Plant the bulb in a container slightly larger than the bulb using potting soil with the tope half of the bulb exposed. A heavy pot is preferable to a lightweight one as the blooming Amaryllis can be top heavy.

Start watering the bulb 4-6 weeks before the date desired for bloom. If possible, set the watered Amaryllis on a warm surface to encourage early root growth. Or place in a warm spot near furnace or hot water heater until growth begins, and then move it to a sunny spot or a bright, warm, south facing window. Water again when the soil has become quite dry on top. If leaves are not sturdy or are not a dark green or if the flowering stalks are too tall, the Amaryllis is not receiving enough light. If foliage growth exceeds stalk growth, the bulb is receiving too much water. Keep bulb just damp to encourage stalk growth.

To Prepare for Re-blooming
After bloom, cut the stalks 5” above the top of the bulb, stake the leaves and keep them watered until August. They may be kept inside or outside but they require adequate light and protection from snails and disease. If grown inside, turn pot frequently to keep plant from leaving toward the light. Amaryllis usually produces one bloom for every four leaves that develop and from 7-11 leaves are generally produced. Fertilize once a month with one half of the recommended strength of an all purpose fertilizer.

At the end of August, withhold water gradually until leaves have yellowed and withered. Cut them off 3” above the bulb and store for a month in a cool, dark place. Bring the bulbs into the house or into 70 degrees F. for three more weeks. The bulb can now be replanted in a 6” pot with new soil. Take care not to damage the roots.
PAPER WHITE NARCISSUS
Forcing for Indoor Bloom

Culture
Paper White Narcissus and other Polyanthus Narcissus may be forced into bloom in either soil or pebbles with water very easily. If using pebbles and water, allow the water level no higher than the base of the bulb. In baskets or containers, plant the bulbs with the tips barely showing and with the soil well packed down onto the bulbs. Bulbs can be planted in containers or baskets with no drainage. Do not overwater but keep moist.

Rooting in Soil
Baskets and containers should be placed in as cold a place as possible to root well before top growth has a chance to grow. A refrigerator or cold building is the best place, but pleasing results can be obtained at higher temperatures. A cold, dark garage is adequate to allow rooting to take place although the top growth will be higher than ideal. After about 2 weeks in the dark, expose the bulbs to dim or indirect light. As the top growth becomes green, the buds will begin to form. When the buds are mature, the bulbs can be brought inside to force the bloom. If the top growth is too long, tie the leaves to a stake or to the handle of the basket with ribbon or virtually invisible green sewing thread. The bulbs should never be allowed to dry out all through the blooming process.

Timing for Bloom:
The duration of the forcing process can be from 4-7 weeks depending on temperatures and condition. Paper White Narcissus can be staggered in bloom from November through March by starting them every 10 days to 2 weeks. Bulbs may begin to sprout for later plantings, but this will in no way impair their bloom.
After Bloom
Paper White Narcissi are so depleted by the forcing process that most authorities suggest disposing of the bulbs after bloom. If patience is in great supply, they may bloom again eventually, but count on a minimum of three years.

BULB FORCING – General Information
In California and Mild Climates

Forcing is the process of causing a plant to produce its shoot, leaf and flower ahead of its natural schedule. To do this it is necessary to mimic and compress the process the plant would normally go through in the garden. However, the forcing process so depletes the bulb that it will take a minimum of three years, if at all, to rebuild the bulb if planted in the garden afterward, and in California it is mostly unnecessary.

The bulbs easiest to force are hyacinths, paper white narcissus, and amaryllis and spring flowering crocus. Early narcissus, early tulips and irises reticulata and danfordiae can also be forced.

Equipment
To begin, choose containers that are about twice the depth of the bulb.

Clean containers are critical and wire or pottery shards should be placed in the bottom of containers with holes. Regular potting soil may be used if the containers can drain. Containers without holes can also be used with potting soil but produce the best results with the following mixture of ingredients according to Sunset Magazine:

6 parts of peat moss

1 part oyster shell (feed stores)
1 part crushed charcoal

Horticulture Magazine suggests mixing equal parts of the following for non-draining containers:

sphagnum moss, potting soil, sand, vermiculite (or perlite)

If using a soil mixture, soak it well and then squeeze out the excess moisture.

**Planting**
To plant, set the bulbs on enough soil so that their tips will sit just below the rim of the container. Fill with soil to cover bulbs leaving their tips exposed and allow room for watering. Water to settle the soil around the bulbs, if using containers with holes, otherwise pack the dampened moss mixture around the bulbs. A crowded pot is the most dramatic and a 6" pot can hold 6 tulips or 14 crocuses. Plant them as close as possible without letting them touch.

**Rooting**
This is a critical step as if the bulbs start to grow too much before they are well rooted, the bloom will be stunted or they may fail to bloom at all. Rooting should take place at lower temperatures where the top growth is inhibited. A refrigerator is ideal, as the temperature should remain between 38 - 45 degrees F. Covered with plastic or a paper bag, the containers should chill from 8-12 weeks in the refrigerator (in California, it is difficult to force in a basement as temperatures generally do not fall low enough). Daffodils and tulips need longer chilling periods than crocus or hyacinths. To determine whether the time has been long enough, pull gently on the top growth to see how well the roots have developed. If the bulb pulls out easily or top growth is barely visible, return to the refrigerator for the maximum length of time.
**Transition and Bloom**

After the chilling period, move the containers to an area such as a cool garage (50 - 60 degrees F.) with dim lighting for about one week. Afterward, move them into more sun with the same cool temperatures until buds show color. This will take 1-4 weeks. Top growth will get too high if inadequate light is supplied. Bring into a warm room when desired. Setting the bulbs outside at night in a cool, not freezing, spot will prolong the flowering period.

Bulb forcing is more popular (and easier) in the Northern areas of the U.S. because the winter is longer and forcing bulbs gives significant advanced bloom. In California, however, the bulbs bloom a month or two earlier than in the North and forcing does not produce such a distinct advantage over outside planting!
OTHER FAVORITE BULBS AND CORMS

BRODAEA  -  Laxa and Queen Fabiola
Small blue flowers hybridized from wild flowers. Plant 2” deep.

DUTCH IRIS
Plant 4” deep and withhold summer water for best results.

IPHEION  -  ”Wisley Blue” Small blue flowers on 4” stems
naturalize generously.

FREESIA
I have an amazing Antique Freesia that is white with a yellow throat
and very fragrant. Yellow varieties are also very fragrant. Plant point
down, 2” deep in early fall and keep cool to avoid sprouting if not
planted immediately.

IXIA
Cornflower is the common name for this small bulb with wiry,
swaying stems. Beautiful, small pink, cream, or red flowers and is
very good for cutting. Naturalizes. Plant 2” deep.

MUSCARI ARMENIACUM
These little blue (grape hyacinths) beaded stalked flowers are about 4-
6” tall and bloom in March. These look terrific in sunny border areas
but will take shade as well. The bulbs are small and increase
dramatically. Plant 2” deep.

RANUNCULUS
Plant the corms with fingers pointing down about 2” beneath the
surface of the soil. Water well.

SCILLA  -  Woodland Hyacinth
Plant about 4” down in shady spots amid azaleas, shrubs or wherever
the plantings will not be disturbed. These will naturalize and increase.