

# Planning for Winter and Spring Flowers

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**A CAREFULLY-SELECTED** range of bulbs can provide splashes of colour and features of interest in the flower garden from mid-winter until late summer. Autumn is the time to make sure that the garden is well stocked with winter- and spring-blooming bulbs, and there are many species and varieties from which to choose. An autumn sowing of flower seeds should also be made to ensure bright displays next spring.

**ANNUALS** and other flower seeds sown earlier in the year where they are to flower next season should be thinned as soon as they can be handled. At the first thinning the seedlings should be left at least 1in. apart, but they should not be over-thinned in the autumn, as many of the plants may become casualties during the winter. As the young plants touch each other every other one may be pulled out, until final thinning is done in the spring when they start to grow strongly. It is still not too late to sow seeds of hardy annuals—sweet peas, calendulas, larkspurs, viscaria, Iceland poppies, and antirrhinums. If sown outdoors, the seedlings are sufficiently hardy to stand winter weather and produce early-flowering plants next spring.

**Bulbs and corms** which may be planted in March to flower in the spring include hyacinths, tulips, narcissi, crocuses, freesias, lachenalias, ixias, grape hyacinths, sparaxis, and babianas. **Hyacinths** do best in a deep, rich soil in which liberal dressings of compost or other form of humus have been incorporated. **Narcissi** (including daffodils) prefer a soil in which there is no fresh manure and which has not been limed recently. However, a dressing of blood and bone worked deeply into the soil before planting will improve both the quality of the flower and the size of the new bulbs produced next summer. **Narcissi** will tolerate wet soils much better than tulips. **Tulips** seem to grow best in soils which have been recently limed and dressed with blood and bone and superphosphate (at the rate of 1oz. of each a square yard). The depth at which tulips should be planted has been a subject of controversy for years. There are many advocates of deep planting, which does seem to produce



Ranunculuses planted in March should make a brilliant display in October.

more healthy plants, and in a good, deep soil tulip bulbs are often put as far as 10in. below the surface. That would be too deep for commercial practice, because of the difficulty of lifting the bulbs each year, but it is worth trying in a garden where the bulbs can be left undisturbed for several years.

**Carnation** layers which were pegged down in December should now be well rooted. Sever them from the parent plant and transplant them into the border where they are to flower next year.

**Cuttings** of violas and pansies can still be rooted in cold frames if insufficient have been propagated to make a bright show next year.

**Flower heads** should be picked off as flowers fade from herbaceous and other flowering plants. This is an everlasting job in the flower garden, but one that pays handsome dividends by prolonging the flowering season as late into the autumn as possible.

**Ranunculuses** do best in a soil which is well drained, as waterlogging injures the roots and makes the plants yellow and unhealthy. Large, sturdy, well-flowered plants can be produced only in reasonably rich soil, though they do not appreciate fresh manure. The ideal is to plant them in a soil to which a liberal dressing of compost

has been added or which was well manured last season. The tubers are best soaked for 12 hours before being planted, and should then be put out 4 to 6in. apart and 2in. deep, with the claws of the roots pointing downward. Most good strains produce a high proportion of double and semi-double flowers, but all strains contain a proportion of single ones.

**Geraniums** (bedding or "zonal" and ivy-leaved types) can be propagated easily from cuttings. Though these will root at almost any time of the year, they are best taken in summer and autumn. Pieces of new growth, 3 to 4in. long, should be cut off and the base of each carefully trimmed back with a razor blade to just below the bottom leaf. The bottom two or three leaves should be removed and the cuttings dibbled 3in. apart into firm, light, sandy soil in a frame or warm border. The hole should be made with a flat-ended dibber so that the cut end of the cutting is in contact with the soil. Cuttings require very little water until they start to grow. These types of geranium, and especially Paul Crampel and King of Denmark, are liable to be attacked by a virus disease which causes pale yellow spots to appear on the leaves. The spots later die out and the leaves become crinkled and puckered: in