

AUTUMN FLOWERING BULBS

In the Canberra area bulbs are not just a spring thing - there are bulbs, corms and tubers you can plant for flowers each season. Here's a few of our favourites for autumn (March - May).

- **COLCHICUM (AUTUMN CROCUS)** - these astonishing corms from Central Asia quickly pop up and surprise you about March. They flower 'naked', without any leaves, with beautiful large wineglass-shaped flowers usually in shades of pink. Each corm will put out many blooms. The large glossy pleated leaves follow after the flowers die down. Try them in pots or for a real novelty leave a bare corm to flower on a table or a dish - without any water or soil! Remember though to plant them as soon as the flowers fade so the roots and leaves can grow to build up next year's flower display.

- Colchicums are very easy to grow - just give them a sunny or slightly shaded position with good drainage and protected from strong winds. Also protect them from snails and slugs. Usually left to multiply in a clump, so when planting space them well, about 15 cms apart, at a depth of 10 cms.

- **NERINE (SPIDER LILY)** - these bulbs from Africa really like it tough. The spidery, long-stemmed flowers make good cut flowers and come in a range of clear colours, pink being the most common but also red, white and salmon. A good bulb for pots, why not bring the pot indoors when in flower?

- Nerines are also very easy to grow. They want to be left undisturbed and will flower best when crowded and in a full sun position. Plant them 15-20 cms apart, with the necks sticking out of the soil.

- **LYCORIS (SPIDER LILY)** - these bulbs from Japan are very similar to Nerines (they even have the same common name!) but need quite different growing conditions. The spidery flowers emerge well before the leaves and are usually more coronet-shaped: the usual colours are rose red or golden yellow. They make good cut flowers and they grow well in pots. A nice colour splash in any garden, including Japanese style.

- Lycoris are easy to grow in a lightly shaded position and they want to be left undisturbed for many years. Plant about 10cms apart, with their necks just sticking out above soil level.

- **WOODLAND CYCLAMEN (*Cyclamen hederifolium*)** - these spreading perennial tubers from the Mediterranean are usually available while actively growing in pots - you'll find them in our shadehouse. The flowers emerge a little before the decorative marbled leaves, in colour shades of pink to white. They will steadily spread into a patch and can self-seed freely. A delightful carpet of colour under trees and shrubs.

- Cyclamen are easy to grow in a lightly shaded position where they can be left to naturalise. Make sure the tubers are at or near the soil surface and add a thin layer of leaf mould annually.

WHAT DO THEY LIKE?

Preparation – all these plants like to be left undisturbed long-term, so it's worth preparing the soil well by adding compost or well rotted manure and making sure the drainage is good. Plant from January.

Fertilising – feed during the active growing season. We recommend Healthy Earth fertilisers.

Watering – water sparingly while in active growth, but keep quite dry while dormant.

Pests and diseases - generally trouble-free, just guard against snails and slugs.