

## **BULBS FOR FALL PLANTING IN MILD MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATES**

By Pat Welsh

We use the term “bulbs” to cover a wide range of plants that grow not only from true bulbs but also from corms, tubers, rhizomes, and tuberous roots.

A **bulb** is a modified subterranean leaf bud; it has a basal plate above which are food-storing scales surrounding a bud from which comes a plant.

A **corm** is a thickened subterranean stem that is a solid piece of food-storage tissue and that produces a plant from buds on its top.

A **tuber** is a thickened stem that serves as a food-storage chamber and from which a plant grows. It grows totally or partially underground. A potato is a tuber.

A **rhizome** is a thickened stem that grows horizontally underground or on the surface of the ground.

A **tuberous root** is a thickened root that grows underground and has growth buds on top in the old stem portion from which the plant springs.

Some bulbs require much irrigation and special handling in order to survive and bloom in our climate. Others are perfectly adapted to Mediterranean climates, such as ours, and fit in perfectly with our new view of Sustainable Gardening, in tune with our dry climate and water restrictions, can be grown with native grasses like *Carex pansa* and other drought-resistant lawn-substitutes, such as *Achillea tomentosum*.

### **HYBRID BULBS - MAY OR MAY NOT SURVIVE FOR MORE THAN ONE SEASON**

❖ Florists' cyclamen (*Cyclamen persicum*) - One of our most elegant plants for long-lasting winter color in shade. Long-lasting blooms easily ruined by rain. Excellent in bright light under an overhang. Yank, don't cut off faded blooms.

❖ Miniature cyclamen 'Miracle' and 'Laser'; others. - Stand up better to rain. Easier to grow than the larger type. More heat resistant.

❖ Persian ranunculus (*Ranunculus asiaticus* 'Tecolote Giant') - You may have up to 60 or even as many as 70 flowers from one large corm.

### **HARDY SPRING-FLOWERING BULBS FOR ONE-TIME FLOWERING**

❖ Common or Florists' Hyacinth (*Hyacinthus orientalis*) - NEED PRECHILLING.

❖ Tulip (*Tulipa*) - Always purchase large, Grade A tulips. Darwin Hybrid types are the most fool-proof. Try planting them in a tub under sky-shine. Let the sun come back to them in spring. NEED PRECHILLING. Plant late so the ground is not too warm.

❖ Dutch crocus (*Crocus vernus*) - Try in pots. Not really adapted for here. NEED PRE-CHILLING.

❖ Daffodil (*Narcissus*) - Always purchase Grade A, 2-nose and 3-nose daffodils such as King Alfred. Important only to grow these better kinds, available at the best local nurseries. NEED NO PRECHILLING. Most will not naturalize in mild coastal climates. (Pre-chilling has no effect on second-year performance.) VARIETIES THAT MAY NATURALIZE IN MILD COASTAL CLIMATES: 'February Gold', 'Ice Follies', and 'Fortune'.

### **BULBS FOR "FORCING" IN PEBBLES AND WATER**

❖ Tazetta hybrid narcissi - Always purchase Grade A. 'Grand Soleil d'Or', 'Paper White' & 'Chinese Sacred Lily' are best.

### **BULBS FOR NATURALIZING IN MEDITERRANEAN CLIMATES**

Many of these bulbs are native to South Africa. Most of these bulbs are compatible with sustainable landscaping. Most are drought-resistant, easy, and good for mixing into low meadows. Some of these are mentioned elsewhere on this handout. A few need regular garden irrigation.

❖ African corn lily (*Ixia maculata*) - Regular water during growth and bloom. Easy to grow. May naturalize

❖ Aztec lily (*Sprekelia formosissima*.) - Fall planting for summer bloom. Long lived.

❖ Cyclamen species. (*Cyclamen cercilium*, *C. coum*, *C. hederifolium*, *C. perspurascens* and *C. repandum*) - These may be difficult to find. Plant in fall. Some bloom in summer. Only by trial and error can you discover those that will work.

❖ Narcissus 'February Gold' - Naturalizes in some gardens.

❖ Species tulips: Lady tulip (*Tulipa clusiana*), (*T. bakeri* 'Lilac Wonder'), *T. saxatilis*, *T. sylvestris*, *T. tarda*. - Others if you can find them and check zones so you are sure they can naturalize here.

❖ Baboon flower (*Babiana rubrocyanea*, *B. stricta*)

❖ Blackberry lily (*Bellamcanda chinensis*) - Regular water during growth and bloom.

- ❖ Brodiaea - Many kinds native to California coast. Difficult to find. Some are now classed as Tritoleila.
- ❖ Chasmanthe (*Chasmanthe aethiopica* and *C. floribunda*) - Totally care-free. This is what you see growing wild here and there on banks and under eucalyptus in old gardens, with no water or care. *C. floribunda* grows thickly in a roadside parking strip on south side 15<sup>th</sup> street near Forest Way in Del Mar.
- ❖ Chincherinchee (*Ornithogalum thyrsoides*) - White, fragrant, late bloom. Good in interior gardens. May naturalize inland.
- ❖ Chinese ground orchid (*Bletilla striata*) - Needs regular water during growth and bloom.
- ❖ *Crocasmia masionorum* - See the one that is Montbretia below, formerly called Tritonia.
- ❖ *Crocasmia* Hybrids include 'Lucifer' that blooms in summer.
- ❖ Dutch iris 'Wedgewood' - Can go dry in summer and will still come back.
- ❖ False blue flax. (*Heliophila coronopifolia*) - A pass-along plant. Can take over in spots where happy with little care or water. Green leaves most of the year in a clump or dies down and comes back with the rains.
- ❖ Flame freesia (*Tritonia crocata*) - Sometimes called Montbretia but this is not right.
- ❖ Flax lily. (*Dianella tasmanica*) - A pass-along plant also available in nurseries. New varieties are easy to grow, dwarf, drought-resistant with grayish foliage. Make good clump. Gorgeous blue berries long lasting in garden or in arrangements. (Don't let them fall on carpets since they can stain.)
- ❖ Freesia - Dutch and Tecolote hybrids are what are sold. Older ones are pass-along plants, far better than new, find them in old gardens. These are fragrant, do not get knocked down in rain, come back reliably every year, but are not available in the trade.
- ❖ Fringe flower (*M. comosum.*) - Most muscari's need a little winter chill to survive for another year. All need water during growth and bloom. Will make big clumps where successful. Best just to try them out.
- ❖ Grape hyacinth - *Muscari armeniacum* is best one, *M. aucheri*, *M. azureum*, *M. botryoides*, *M. latifolium*, *M. macrocarpum*, *M. neglectum* are other possibilities.
- ❖ Harlequin flower (*Sparaxis tricolor.*) - Regular water during growth and bloom.

- ❖ *Homeria* (*Homeria collina*, *Moraea collina*) - Keep dry or well drained in summer.
- ❖ *Ipheon* (*Ipheon uniflorum* 'Rolph Fiedler', 'Album', and 'Wisley Blue') - from Argentina
- ❖ *Montbretia* (*Crocasmia* xx *crocosmiiflora*, *T. crocosmiiflora*) - A "pass-along" plant found in old gardens. Summer bloom. Fall planting.
- ❖ Naked lady (*Amaryllis belladonna*) - Plant in fall for August bloom
- ❖ *Oxalis purpurea* "Grand Duchess", and others - Many interesting kinds for naturalizing. My favorite *Oxalis purpurea* has gray-green leaves and pink flowers and blooms throughout winter. Difficult to find except as plant. Start from plants, not bulbs. Spreads slowly.
- ❖ Spanish bluebell. (*Hyacinthoides hispanica*, *Scilla campanulata*) - Need some summer water to survive and bloom.
- ❖ *Triteleia* (formerly *Brodiaea*) 'Queen Fabiola' and others/several species - No irrigation needed.
- ❖ *Watsonia* - *Watsonia borbonica* (deciduous) and *W. pillansii* (evergreen)