



**PROPER CARE** — This photo provided by MelindaMyers.com shows Tulipa En-durance and Apricot Foxx. Providing prop-er care to tulips and other spring flowering bulbs will extend your enjoyment and keep them coming back for years.

# Care for spring flowering bulbs

By MELINDA MEYERS  
Special to The Messenger

Bright yellow daffodils, colorful tulips and fragrant hyacinths brighten our spring gardens. Give them the care they need to extend their spring display and keep them coming back for years.

Hybrid tulips and hyacinths are short-lived stars of the spring garden. They bloom profusely the first spring, but the number of flowers decline each year. You may want to treat these like annuals, carefully removing them from the garden to avoid damaging any remaining plants. Toss these in the compost pile and start planning for their replacements. It is a great opportunity to try something new and freshen the look of your spring garden. If you are looking for a permanent replacement, consider using species tulips that are less floriferous but return each year.

Add a few years to the life of hybrid tulips and daffodils and get the most from all your long-lived spring flowering bulbs with proper care. Water spring gardens thoroughly whenever the top few inches of soil are crumbly and just slightly moist. Spring rains often take care of this task, but when they don't it is easy to forget to provide

spring gardens with the water they need. Providing the right amount of water when needed will keep your bulbs looking their best.

Bulbs often receive sufficient nutrients at the time of planting or when the other plants in the garden are fertilized. Apply fertilizer to established bulb plantings, if needed, as the leaves begin to emerge from the soil. Use a low nitrogen, slow-release fertilizer to encourage slow steady growth. Follow the label directions so you apply the recommended amount for the area you are fertilizing.

Remove spent flowers on tulips and hyacinths you plan to keep so the energy is directed back into the bulbs instead of setting seeds. Do the same if you want to improve the appearance of daffodils. Leave allium seed heads in place to extend their beautiful contribution to the garden. Remove these before they drop their seeds if you want to limit the number of seedlings sprouting in next year's garden. The same is true for grape hyacinths and squills. The only reason to remove their faded flowers is to slow down the spread.

Leave the leaves on your bulbs until they naturally

yellow and dry. The leaves produce energy needed for beautiful blooms next spring. The longer you leave the leaves intact, the more energy and better bloom for next season.

Hide the declining bulb leaves by planting annuals between the bulbs. Or add perennial flowers that return each year for a more permanent solution. As the bulbs decline, the perennials will grow and mask the declining foliage. Try mixing spring flowering perennials for double the impact or combine with summer and fall bloomers to extend the floral show.

Take some pictures of your spring bulb display and make notes of the areas where you want to add some color. Then order early for the best selection and to make sure you are ready for bulb planting season next fall.

*Editor's note: Melinda Myers has written more than 20 gardening books, including "Small Space Gardening". She hosts "The Great Courses" "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and the nationally-syndicated Melinda's Garden Moment TV & radio program. Myers is also a columnist and contributing editor for Birds & Blooms magazine. Her website is www.MelindaMyers.com.*

# Tech to make gardening more fun

Many people take to the great outdoors to escape the increasingly tech-driven daily grind. Though that's an understandable perspective, gardeners who aren't deploying tech in their home gardens could be missing out on a host of benefits that could help their plants, flowers and vegetables thrive.

Devices like smartphones and tablets have made many aspects of life easier and more efficient, and various tech products can do the same when working in the garden.

- **Plant monitor:** Plant monitors are sensors that can keep tabs on the health of plants and deliver that information to gardeners. Plant monitors often connect to smartphones via Bluetooth and can deliver information on the amount of heat, light and water a plant is getting. Sensors vary in price, and some will provide more information than others. But these sensors are ideal for gardeners who love their plants but often forget to check up on them each day.
- **Garden camera:** Critters and insects are the bane of many gardeners' existence. Determining just what is nibbling away at flowers and plants isn't always so easy, as many animals are savvy enough to restrict their dining to the middle of the night and insects are so small they can be hard to spot. Garden cameras can serve as the watchmen of a garden and gardeners can review footage to determine just who is compromising all of their hard work. They can then use that knowledge to remedy the situation and give their plants a better chance to thrive.
- **Weather station:** Even the most seasoned gardeners



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cannot document the conditions outside as effectively as a good weather sensor. Weather sensors track conditions such as temperature, relative humidity and air quality. This information can then be paired with irrigation devices to ensure plants get all the care they need to thrive throughout the season.

- **Garden hub:** Avid gardeners have traditionally had to arrange for neighbors or loved ones to tend to their plants when they leave home for vacation or weekend getaways. Garden hubs can take care of that by pairing with smart

irrigation systems that ensure plants are watered even when no one is home. Certain hubs even gather and analyze local weather conditions to develop a watering schedule to ensure plants thrive. These hubs aren't just handy when on vacation, as they can be great for gardeners who want to know things about their plants that are not apparent to the naked eye.

People may see their gardens as welcome respites from their devices. But garden gadgets can help plants thrive and make time in the garden that much more enjoyable.

# Air current can carry pesticides

According to the Environmental Protection Agency, air currents can carry pesticides that were applied to nearby properties.

That means even people who do not apply pesticides in their lawns and gardens can still be at risk of exposure to these potentially harmful chemicals. People concerned by the prospect of being exposed to the pesticides being applied by their neighbors can stay indoors with their children

and pets while the substances are being applied.

Those who live near fields and parks where pesticides are routinely applied can plant hardy, thick-branched trees to reduce their risk of airborne exposure.

The EPA notes that such plants and shrubs can serve as buffers against airborne pesticides, essentially acting as walls around a property that prevent gusty winds from blowing pesticides into yards and gardens.



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