



Designers' favourite bulbs

Five highly regarded garden designers share their choice of the spring-flowering bulbs they love best to help inspire your spring displays

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1 GAP PHOTOS / HOWARD RICE



Dan Pearson

Dan is a Wisley and Kew-trained garden designer and plantsman. At Chelsea this year his show garden was awarded a gold medal and 'Best in Show'.

1 *Tulipa sprengeri*

The latest of all tulips, flowering in early May, and unusual in its preference for damp conditions and dappled shade. Seeds freely in thin grass or among late perennials. 45cm. AGM*. RHS H6, USDA 3a-9b†.

2 *Crocus tommasinianus* 'Albus'

The pure white form of my favourite species crocus, loved for its willingness to self-seed and naturalise. Always plant in sun or it will refuse to open to reveal a splash of yellow anthers. 12cm. USDA 3a-8b.

3 *Fritillaria meleagris*

Naturalises in damp ground and thin turf. Plant bulbs deep at 15cm, or pot up and plant out when in growth for best results. 30cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-8b.

4 *Ficaria verna* 'Brazen Hussy'

Discovered by Christopher Lloyd in his woods at Great Dixter in 1976, this is hard to beat for its cheerfulness. Appears in the first weeks of spring, blinking gold over lustrous, dark foliage. Gives early ground cover and is gone by the time perennials rise to take the territory. 10cm. RHS H7, USDA 4a-9b.

5 *Ipheion* 'Alberto Castillo'

A clean, white selection with a dark line on the reverse of each petal. Grow in a bright, free-draining position or by a warm wall that will help protect emerging foliage. Out early and flowers for weeks. 20cm. AGM. RHS H4.

6 *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *leichtlinii*

Tall flower spikes rise up with the meadows as the grasses come into flower. Creamy stars fizz up the stem to stand tall and elegant above neighbours. Self-seeds riotously in open ground but pleasant in meadow grass when happy. 1.2m. USDA 5a-9b.

7 *Erythronium dens-canis*

This dog's tooth violet has a splay of inky-blue foliage, mottled as if splashed. Violet flowers fling their petals back to reveal a cinnamon speckling at their base and a push of pale stamens. Self-seeds in thin turf with spring moisture and little competition. 25cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-9b.

2 MARIANNE MAJERUS GARDEN IMAGES; 3 GAP PHOTOS / HEATHER EDWARDS; 4 GARDEN WORLD IMAGES / LEE THOMAS; 5 GARDEN WORLD IMAGES / N&K COLEBORN; 6 STEFFEN HAUSER / BOTANIKFOTO / ALAMY; 7 GARDEN WORLD IMAGES / TREVOR SIMS



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*Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society.

†Hardiness ratings given where available.



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Rosemary Alexander

Rosemary opened the internationally respected English Gardening School in 1983 and she is a regular show judge for the RHS.

1 *Ornithogalum nutans*

With silvery grey-green bluebell-like flowers, it is subtle and beloved by flower arrangers as it lasts well when picked. A woodlander and therefore best in well-drained light shade. Great among ferns. 22cm. AGM. RHS H4, USDA 6a-10b.

2 *Eranthis hyemalis* (Tubergenii Group) 'Guinea Gold'

This is the showiest of the *Eranthis* hybrids, flowering in February with larger flowers and a distinctive green ruff around the egg yolk-yellow flower. Long lived and best under deciduous shrubs or hedges. 8cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-7b.

3 *Iris histrioides* 'Lady Beatrix Stanley'

This iris has rich-blue falls, with a yellow stripe in its centre. Buds poke through in February, coinciding with the last of the snowdrops. Good in gravel or under deciduous shrubs, although it's caviar to slugs. 15cm. USDA 3a-8b.

4 *Muscari armeniacum* 'Valerie Finnis'

Pale powder-blue, tightly packed spikes show up well against the slightly glaucous green leaves. This will come back in subsequent years, spreading slowly in reasonable soil in open sunny positions, or in pots or part shade. 18cm. USDA 4a-8b.

5 *Narcissus* 'Thalia'

Greeny-white and fragrant, with two or more nodding flowers per stem. A timeless and elegant classic, it flowers March to April, is vigorous and does well in light shade and acid soil. It is also long lasting when picked. 35cm. USDA 3a-8b.

6 *Erythronium* 'Pagoda'

This has elegant, golden-yellow flowers with reflexed petals and lightly marbled foliage. It prefers well-drained, humus-rich soil in part shade. Plant the bulb as soon as you receive it with the pointed end upwards – and do not let it dry out. 30cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-9b.

1 PREMIUM STOCK PHOTOGRAPHY / GMBH / ALAMY; 2 GAP PHOTOS / JONATHAN BUCKLEY; 3 GAP PHOTOS / ROB WHITWORTH; 4 THE GARDEN COLLECTION / FLORA PRESS / CHRISTINE ANNE FILLIS GARDENWORLD IMAGES; 5 CLIVE NICHOLS GARDEN PICTURES; 6 GAP PHOTOS / ALAMY



Hannah Gardner

Kew-trained Hannah has worked at Sissinghurst and Great Dixter. She's developing her design practice and works part time as a head gardener.

1 *Fritillaria acmopetala*

These eye-catching fritillaries establish easily. Flowering is improved by a late-season feed (for next-season flowers) and light twig supports. The nodding, pale-green, petals are streaked with rich maroon and reflex at the tip. They associate well with creamy, late-season narcissus. 30-40cm. AGM. RHS H4, USDA 5a-8b.

2 *Galanthus plicatus* 'Wendy's Gold'

If you are taking steps towards a snowdrop collection, this fine selection of the Crimean snowdrop *G. plicatus* is straightforward, beautiful and reliable. It has a yellow ovary and a large yellow inner mark. 20cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 4a-9b.

3 *Ornithogalum magnum*

Whirls of delicate, white flowers are held away from a tall, stiff stem in late spring. Ideal in natural plantings, it makes a good companion to later alliums or naturalised in grass following on from camassia. If happy, it will increase and roam around, without being invasive. 60cm. USDA 5a-8b.

4 *Tulipa* 'Jan Reus'

A reliable mid-season tulip, its deep ox-blood red combines with just about every hue from limes, pinks, purples to oranges. The stems are strong and the flower head compact and long lasting with an interior bowl of deep blue. 45cm. USDA 3a-7b.

5 *Iris tuberosa*

This is reliably hardy but its slender stems demand moderate shelter from winds, and it needs sun. The flowers have delicate translucent jade-green standards and compact, voluptuous falls of inky purple. It is intoxicating for its powdery scent as much as its appearance. An interesting cut flower, it partners well with late snowdrops. 15-30cm. RHS H5, USDA 7a-9b.

6 *Allium obliquum*

A very hardy and useful allium, its subtle lime-yellow flower heads appear to float above slender grey stems, and contrast well with the purples and blues of late spring. It increases into clumps and self-sows readily if happy. 80cm. USDA 4a-8b.

1 GAP PHOTOS / TORIE CHUGG; 2 GAP PHOTOS / HOWARD RICE; 3 GARDENWORLD IMAGES / TREVOR SIMS; 4 GAP PHOTOS / VISIONS; 5 CLIVE NICHOLS GARDEN PICTURES; 6 GAP PHOTOS / BJORN HANSSON



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Tom Stuart-Smith

Landscape designer Tom's current projects vary from restoring an Islamic garden in the medina of Marrakech to proposals for several public spaces in London.

1 *Anemone nemorosa* 'Robinsoniana'
This is one of the loveliest of spring flowers in my garden. The delicate, pale lilac-blue is very lovely with the first flowers of *Epimedium x versicolor* 'Sulphureum' and green hellebores. 15-30cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 5a-9b.

2 *Narcissus* 'Toto'
A neat, white and graceful mid-season narcissus, which is small enough to plant in clumps through low astrantias and cranesbills, without leading one to regret the aftermath. Like a smaller *N. 'Thalia'* but with a creamy cup. 15-30cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-11.

3 *Tulipa* 'Generaal de Wet'
This is the perfect tulip to anchor strongly coloured cultivars, such as 'Ballerina', 'Jan Reus' or 'Paul Scherer'. I never order enough of it and never tire of its deep, rusty red, edged with amberish yellow. Think a Titian painting. 45cm. USDA 3a-8b.

4 *Camassia quamash*
Startling short spikes of dazzling blue in early June. Often recommended for grass where it is indeed very lovely, but it's also good to plant in quantity amid late emerging herbaceous perennials, such as *Thalictrum delavayi* or even to thug it out with miscanthus. Needs moist ground. 45-60cm. USDA 4a-8b.

5 *Narcissus* 'Actaea'
This is very similar, if not quite so delicate, to the incomparable *Narcissus poeticus* var. *recurvus*, but it flowers three weeks earlier in April. Perfect for naturalising in long grass in loose drifts. 45cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

6 *Crocus* 'Vanguard'
As an individual flower this can't compare with the delicacy of a plant, such as *Crocus sieberi* or *C. tommasinianus*, but for sheer impact it is superb. A subtle, pale violet, it is quite lovely with *Narcissus lobularis*. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-9b.

1 IMAGEBROKER / ALAMY; 2 FLORA PRESS/JOANNA KOSSAK; 3 FLOWERS AND GARDENS BY JAN SMITH PHOTOGRAPHY / ALAMY; 4 GARDENWORLD IMAGES / ALAMY; 5 GAPPHOTOS / HOWARD RICE; 6 GAPPHOTOS / TORIE CHLUG



Mary Keen

A journalist and author, Mary also works as a designer with Pip Morrison, but her own garden remains her favourite project.

1 *Galanthus elwesii* 'Mrs Macnamara'
The earliest snowdrop after Christmas, which appears just when you think the garden is never going to come to life again. It is a tall, stately type and increases fast. XXcm. RHS H5.

2 *Anemone apennina*
I love the blue-flowered *Anemone blanda*, which does well on my limestone soil, but later and more delicate, and far harder to source, is this beautiful pale anemone. 20cm. AGM. RHS H4, USDA 6a-8b.

3 *Tulipa* 'Generaal de Wet'
Scented tulips are a bonus and the orange single early 'Generaal de Wet' is one of my favourites. 'Striped Bellona' is showier and later but delicious in a pot outside the front door. 45cm. USDA 3a-8b.

4 *Narcissus* 'Trevithian'
Egg yolk-yellow and scented, and good for picking, this jonquil lasts longer than most in the garden and has a tall and graceful form. 30cm. USDA 3a-9b.

5 *Scilla bithynica*
The Turkish squill is good at Great Dixter. It likes wetter, shadier conditions than most bulbs, but there is always a risk of getting some dingy pinks included so this is not a bulb to buy on the cheap. 15cm. AGM. RHS H5.

6 *Tulipa clusiana*
The species lady tulip is hard to find. One for sunny places, the named form *T. 'Lady Jane'* is lovely. *T. clusiana* 'Cynthia' has yellow inner petals rather than white, which I find less attractive with the cherry red outside of the flower. 25cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-7b.

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