

Year Round Gardening

Care of Tulips and Daffodils After Bloom

Fredricka Bogardus, Colorado Master Gardener

Toward the end of May your tulips and daffodils finish blooming. If you expect them to come back and bloom again in subsequent years they need a bit of care now. The goal is to maximize energy storage in the bulbs for future growth.

1. As the blooms fade remove them. This process called deadheading will minimize the energy the plant uses to produce new seed.
2. Application of a balanced fertilizer as blooms fade will benefit the bulbs. If you have a long bloom period you can apply the fertilizer once you need to start deadheading early blooms. You don't have to wait until all blooms are finished as by that time the earlier bloomers may be fading. Use a balanced fertilizer (a product that has roughly equal percentages of Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Pottasium).



Photo courtesy of Freddie Bogardus

3. Do not cut back foliage until it turns brown. It generally takes about 8 weeks after bloom for the foliage to fade. During that time the leaves are manufacturing and storing carbohydrates in the bulb. Avoid the temptation to do anything with these leaves (don't trim, braid or tie them up). Just let them be until they die back on their own.
4. If you wish to remove any of the bulbs to replant you can dig them up after the foliage dies back. You can also wait until autumn to dig them up and move them. However it is much easier to see where they are planted while the brown foliage is still in place. Dig carefully, to avoid damaging the bulbs. Once they are dug up gently brush soil off, allow them to dry in a cool, dark, well ventilated, location. It is important to dry them in a single

layer. Once they are dry examine them for any signs of disease or damage. Remove offsets (new bulbs that have formed on the parent bulb), they will be new plants next season Discard any damaged bulbs. Continue storage until autumn when you can replant them.

Daffodils can be maintained for many years using these practices. They are long living perennials. Tulips are less long lived and somewhat more difficult to perennialize. Some tulips like Darwins, and species varieties are more likely to perennialize. If your goal is to have perennial tulips then choose your variety carefully, and plant them in a place that will have fairly dry soil during their dormant period (excess water will cause the bulbs to rot). Many people use tulips as annuals, digging up the bulbs after bloom and discarding them. The bulbs are relatively inexpensive and this can work really well for gardeners who use a lot of summer annuals in the landscape.

When you have questions, Colorado State University Extension has research based answers. The help desk is located at 17 N. Spruce Street. Hours are Monday to Thursday from 9 am – 12 pm, phone 520-7684 or email CSUmg2@elpasoco.com. Get answers to your horticulture questions any time day or night at ask.extension.org. For current garden tips visit www.facebook.com/ColoradoMasterGardeners.EPC