

Year Round Gardening

Welcome Spring with Some Early Bloomers and Spring Ephemerals

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Those first flowers will make you smile, whether it is a few crocus or a hellebore in bloom. I need those first blooms. While most of these cannot be planted now, I encourage you to mark your calendar to add some of these early performers to your garden.

Spring ephemerals are a special kind of early blooming plant. They are herbaceous perennials that complete their lifecycle very early, before the trees leaf and block sunlight from understory plants. Ephemerals generally complete a life cycle by late spring. Many will go dormant in early to mid-summer. They tend to bloom soon after spring bulbs finish and provide a nice transition to later blooming plants.

Since these plants are adapted to grow early in the gentle light of spring they are a good choice for shady areas in your garden. Many have beautifully colored foliage, reds and purples and abundant blooms. Since they start growing once the snow melts, they generally get enough moisture and do not need much additional irrigation prior to the heat of summer.

Mark your calendars, I have provided some examples of early bloomers and ephemerals with planting times.



Photo courtesy of Freddie Bogardus

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Early bloomers

Plant spring to autumn

Hellebore or Lenten rose (*Helleborus sp*) : Super early bloom often in March, may be evergreen, shade loving foliage makes a good ground cover through summer and fall. Deer and rabbit resistant.

Leopards bane (*Doronicum orientale*): These cheerful yellow flowers will brighten your garden as early as April. Plants are clump forming compact and look nice after the bloom. Tolerates a wide variety of light conditions. Deer and rabbit resistant.

Columbine (*Aquilegia sp*): our state wildflower blooms May to June. Tolerates a variety of light conditions but does best in partial shade. Blooms from mid to late May. Not deer and rabbit resistant.

Plant in fall

Spring bulbs: Tulips, crocus, daffodils: these bulbs bloom early to late spring. tolerate a wide range of light conditions, but probably best in full sun; best inter-planted with perennials which will hide fading foliage after bloom. Deer and rabbit resistance varies by species.

Spring Ephemerals

Plant in spring

Bleeding heart (*Dicentra sp*): this beautiful plant with a tragic name is a great addition to a shady garden. It will bloom in May. Dieback may occur by early summer, however if the garden is shady and moist the plant will stay green later.

Pasque flower (*Pulsatilla sp*): This plant blooms March to April. It's purple flowers with yellow centers will brighten your garden. While the plant goes dormant soon after bloom it will have showy, silky seed heads that will persist after bloom. Not deer and rabbit resistant.