



Photo by Tom Roe

Spring Sunshine

By Linda Roe

Anyone who lives in Western Washington for more than two months, quickly figures out our cool, wet weather patterns and regional color palette of greens and grays. Even Washington natives like me, who love the beauty and appreciate the climate, have been known to whine and complain about the weather in the spring. The solution to our spring whine is not to move to California, but to plan ahead and plant spring bulbs now.

Bulbs love our weather! Visit the Skagit Valley in spring and treat yourself to a rainbow of color on a cloudy day.

Most of us don't have the space or budget for a huge display but we (with a few sacks of bulbs and a nice weekend) can plan for spring sunshine in our own gardens. Spring-blooming bulbs are not fussy, but well-drained soil is a must. If they sit in waterlogged soil all winter they will rot. Plant your bulbs in areas that will have sunlight (hopefully!) in spring, and where they will have good air circulation. This prevents problems with the fungal diseases so prevalent in our wet weather. Add a handful of bulb fertilizer and some compost. "Critter" repellent is also helpful when planting tulips.

Little white snowdrops are the earliest bloomers that work well in clumps for naturalizing. Clip a few of the delicate flowers for a small vase so they can be admired up close.

Crocuses are the best known of the early bloomers. The big hybrids are quite showy, carpeting a still-asleep perennial garden. While you're planting, tuck some of the small species crocus under that Japanese maple by the front door.

We can't say spring sunshine without mentioning the bright yellow daffodils. February Gold, Dutch Master and King Alfred are the best known yellows. The white Mt. Hood, yellow and white Ice Follies, and yellow and orange Scarlett O'Hara are worthy of garden space. Try a new one every year and soon you will have a collection. Daffodils are perfectly content just about anywhere but deep shade and dry rooty soil. Best of all, they are "critter resistant"!

To add that rainbow of color to our Northwest green and gray, let's go for some bright tulips. Start with the early rock garden tulips. Their big, bright flowers and striped leaves add punch to a row of blooming primroses edging a walkway.

Now, use the Red Emperor tulips and line the front of that boring boxwood hedge with a few clumps of these – wow! Christmas in March!!

Pink and purple tulips blooming under a flowering cherry in April would look quite lovely, and any mixture of orange and yellow grouped in front of the ubiquitous Northwest rhodies adds spring sunshine indeed! Later, the graceful lily-flowered tulips add a rainbow of color through pansies and forget-me-nots on a rainy May day.

Tulips also do well in pots. Grow a bag of the big showy Parrot tulips for a front entry display. Your best tulips for return are the Darwin, Species and Triumph varieties. Many other tulips tend to die out after a year or two, so treat them as annuals.

There are many other bulbs to try – not as familiar but just as easy to grow. Spring anemones, blooming in fuchsia pink, blue, or white, are quite drought-tolerant. *Fritillaria imperialis* with their tall, bright orange bell-like flowers are good additions to the hummingbird garden. However, its fragrance is less than pleasing, so don't plant it by the front door! The big round flowers of alliums, so requested in June, also need to be planted now.

It's time now to plan(t) ahead and get those little packages of flowering sunshine in the ground!