

Bulb Planting: A Pep Talk for Procrastinators

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Since I'm still feeling the pinch of this awful economy, I didn't buy any flower bulbs this fall. But maybe you did. Maybe you bought armloads of them, lured in by the siren song of those pretty pictures on the bulb packages. And maybe many of those bulbs still haven't gone into the ground. I know all about this, because I used to do the same thing, buying more bulbs than I could plant in a couple of weekends (at least the way I do it). Often I was still planting bulbs into December, which I can easily get away with here in Atlanta.

Today my friend Sandra mentioned that when she lived in Boston, she regarded the day after Thanksgiving as bulb planting day. That surprised me a little bit, but she's a talented landscape designer and she knows her stuff, so apparently that's not too late for that part of the country. Then I started wondering, *When exactly is too late?* So I went to Google Books and rather randomly peeked inside a book called [Month by Month Gardening in the Dakotas](#). And

guess what? The author says that even that far north you can plant bulbs well into November. She even gives tips for continuing to plant after the ground is frozen to a depth of a few inches – which is a level of dedication and insanity that I can't quite fathom.

According to the Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center, ideally you want to get bulbs in the ground six weeks before the ground freezes solid, so they have time to put out roots before all growth stops for the winter. Makes sense. But if your life isn't running on an ideal time schedule this year, the good news is that your bulbs will probably come up and bloom gloriously next spring anyway.

If the weather is already unpleasant where you live, or you find you're still looking at those unplanted bulbs after Thanksgiving, I have a couple of ideas you might employ to avoid losing your bulbs:

- Get a huge bag of potting soil and pot up your bulbs quickly in large containers. (If it's really cold outside, you can work in a garage or basement.) Keep the containers outdoors in a protected spot over the winter, perhaps covering them with mulch. Then in spring, you can move the containers to wherever you want flowers. (And eventually you can transplant the bulbs to a flower bed.)
- Dig a few trenches in an out-of-the-way area, or even in your vegetable plot, if you have one. Then plant the bulbs in rows, quickly, just to get them into the ground. You can transplant them into your flower beds when they come up in spring, and before they bloom. Or, you can use the area as a cutting garden once the flowers emerge, and transplant the bulbs later.

