

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



September 6, 2025

Minor Bulbs Make a Big Impact in the Landscape

Although the minor spring flower bulbs have small flowers, they create a big impact in the landscape. These bulbs are small, and the foliage is short. However, they provide a variety of different flower shapes and colors to the landscape in late winter to spring, especially when planted in groups of the same bulb. Remember, they need to be planted in the fall.

The generic term “bulb” is used to refer to a group of plants that have different food storage structures to support life until the plant’s life cycle begins again. Different storage structures characterized by botanists include bulbs, corms, tubers, tuberous roots, and rhizomes.

Because some bloom very early, plant these small bulbs in an area where they will be seen walking by them every day, or where they are visible from a window inside the house, to enjoy even when it is cold outside

The snow crocus, *Crocus chrysanthus*, begins to bloom in late January to early February. The flowers are small and reach a height of 3 to 4 inches. The flower colors available range from white, purple, light blue, and yellow to flowers with two colors, such as yellow and violet or purple and white. The leaves are grass-like.

Giant crocus or Dutch hybrid crocus, *Crocus* species and hybrids, have larger blossoms than the snow crocus. The giant crocus blooms in early spring, but later than the snow crocus.

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The flower colors available include yellow, purple, white, and white combined with purple. The leaves are grasslike, and foliage reaches 6 inches tall.

Snowdrop, *Galanthus nivalis*, has a little white, bell-shaped flower gracefully hanging down from each flower stem. This little gem may begin to bloom in February. The leaves are linear or strap-shaped. Plant height reaches up to 3 inches.

Netted iris, *Iris reticulata*, has a single violet-blue flower 3 to 5 inches above the ground. This unusual, small iris blooms in late winter. The foliage is grasslike and very fine. Netted iris is a good choice for rock gardens.

Winter aconite, *Eranthis hyemalis*, has a pure yellow to bright gold, cuplike flower that spans 1.5 inches across in early March. Plant height is around 3 inches. The unique foliage looks like a finely frilled, green collar under the flower. The best location for the winter aconite is in an area where the soil does not become too dry during the summer months. Snowdrops can be planted with winter aconite.

Glory of the snow, *Chionodoxa luciliae*, has several small, star-shaped, blue or pink flowers, depending on the cultivar, with white centers. Flowers begin to appear in late March to early April. The height of the flower stem may reach 6 inches.

Striped squill, *Puschkinia scilloides*, has a flower spike with small white flowers. A deep blue stripe appears down the middle of each flower petal. The plant reaches 4 to 6 inches tall. Striped squill is great for naturalizing in a rock garden.

Grape hyacinth, *Muscari armeniacum*, has cobalt-blue, bell-shaped flowers with a narrow white edge at the mouth. The flowers look like grape clusters. The foliage appears in the fall and persists through the winter. Blooms appear in April, and the height of the flower stem

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reaches 4 to 6 inches. Grape hyacinth can also be used in rock gardens and with other spring-flowering bulbs.

Greek windflower, *Anemone blanda*, has a small daisy-like flower. Depending on the cultivar, the flower color is white, pink, or blue. This plant forms a small mound shape covered with flowers reaching 4 to 6 inches tall. The food storage structure for the Greek windflower is a rhizome. As soon as you receive the rhizome, plant it right away to prevent it from drying out; otherwise, the spring performance of the plant may be reduced.

It is important to plant small spring-blooming bulbs early enough in the fall to allow time for root growth before cold soil temperatures reduce plant growth. The bulbs discussed can be left in the soil all year and will return year after year.

Many bulbs should be planted at a depth of two to three times the diameter of the bulb. Place the bulb in the hole with the growing point up; otherwise, the plant may not emerge from the ground. On some bulbs, the growing point end narrows at the top, and the bottom end is flat. Old roots may be attached to the bottom end of the bulb. If you are in doubt about the location of the growing point, place the bulb on its side.

Most bulbs do not require a fertilizer application at planting. They should be fertilized with a complete fertilizer such as 10-10-10 at a rate of 1-2 lbs. per 100 sq. ft. when the foliage is emerging in the spring. Plant bulbs in well-drained locations to prevent them from rotting. Most bulbs prefer a sunny location. The best show of color results when the same type of bulb is planted in groups.

For more information about the minor bulbs, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service office at 270-685-8480.

Annette's Tip:

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The minor bulbs listed above make great plants to include with other spring flowering plants such as daffodils (*Narcissus*) and other spring perennials. The minor bulbs may be available locally or through catalogs, or online.

Upcoming Event

Native Alternatives to Invasive Plants in the Landscape is scheduled for September 17, 2025, at 10:00 a.m. at the Western Kentucky Botanical Garden. We will discuss native alternatives to invasive plants.

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