

Gardeners pick their brightest bulbs

by Tamara Browning

Linda Murphy's fondness of hyacinths moves her.

"These bulbs are such a favorite of mine. I moved to a new home three years ago, and I certainly didn't take all the bulbs, but I dug up just a couple of the hyacinths because they're really my favorite," said Murphy, who lives in Springfield, Ill.

PICKING YOUR FAVORITE - Forced bulbs, such as tulips, hyacinths and tete-a-tete daffodils, can brighten up the home in winter. CNS Photo by Sharon Kirshner.

"I just love the intricacy of the flower itself. I just think they're like a miracle when they pop out, and they usually pop out early.

"It's like a sign of hope."

Several area gardeners have favorite bulbs they say usher in spring and chase away the dreariness of a cold, snowy winter.

Karen Barr of Springfield likes the English bluebell (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*).

"The catalog describes them as old-fashioned, violet blue, incredible naturalizers that last up to four weeks and multiply each year. That's the part I really like," Barr said. "They have strong stems with masses of dainty blue blooms, 10 to 14 inches in height, and bloom in the late spring."

Barr also likes the *Hyacinthoides hispanica*, which are white, blue and pink and are 10 to 14 inches tall.

"I have planted many of these under our large redbud tree, pine and spruce trees," Barr said.

Duane Friend has planted crocuses along an earthen berm that's part of his home landscaping. The crocuses add a bit of variation and seasonal color, starting the season off, he said.

"They're relatively easy to plant and redo if necessary," said Friend, a University of Illinois Extension educator. "In some cases, some of them even come up through in little bits of snow."

Among trouble-free bulbs that Charles Bell likes are daffodils, which are bright, colorful and cheery, he said.

"They do well in cut arrangements. They're pretty trouble free. You plant them and not much happens to them," said Bell, president of the Springfield Civic Garden Club.

"Whereas tulips, if you've got squirrels or mice or something, (they) tend to dig down and eat (the bulbs) sometimes."

Erica Meinkoth, one of three owners of Harvest Moon Designs of Springfield (landscape design, installation and maintenance) likes daffodils and grape hyacinths (*Muscari*). Daffodils are something gardeners can put out and count on coming back every year, Meinkoth said.

The grape hyacinth is "a very small bulb, but it's very long-lasting and they multiply, and they're really hardy," Meinkoth said.

The term "bulb" is commonly used to refer to the thickened underground storage organ produced by some plants.

Many plants people call "bulbs" actually may be a corm, a tuber, a tuberous root or a rhizome, according to Bob Black, a consumer horticultural specialist, in the article "What is a Bulb?" (<http://hort.ufl.edu/GT/bulb/bulb.htm>)

However, a true bulb is a compressed stem (basal plate) bearing a growing point or flower bud and enclosed by thick, fleshy scales called "bulb scales."

"A lot of people - well, I'm included in that - call things 'bulbs' that aren't true bulbs," Bell said.

Completing Bell's list of his favorite "bulblike" plants are:

- Callas. "They bloom all summer, and they're, I think, just a gorgeous flower."

- Anemone blanda (Grecian windflower). "They're a little daisylike flower, almost a ground cover, very low-growing, that bloom in the spring. They're really quite attractive. They're not something you could use as a cut flower."

- Crocus. "They're so bright and cheery early in the year. It means spring is finally coming. "

- Cannas. "From a distance, they make a very attractive planting. The individual flowers aren't really all that attractive, but they fill in a spot to make a very attractive planting."

- Oriental lily (in particular, stargazer). "It's just a summer bloomer. They're big, attractive flowers, pink and white. They come on a stem out of the ground. There may be six or eight flowers on that. "

- Caladium. "If they bloom at all, their flowers don't amount to anything. They have very fancy, big leaves. You can get just all different kinds. Some of them are white with green and pink or green with pink specks. There's really a lot of different varieties, and they're all purchased for their leaves."

- Elephant ear. "They have great big ears. You can get them in green, or there's one that's almost black. Very attractive."

- Amaryllis. "That's generally grown around here as an indoor plant. It's something you can grow and have bloom in midwinter in a pot inside. You can also put it outside and it will grow out there."

- Dahlias. "They have beautiful flowers."

Â© Copley News Service

Gardeners pick their brightest bulbs by Tamara Browning