

Gone Gardening

Underutilized Treasures of the Bulb World

By Zannah Crowe, Horticulturist – Monches Farm, LLC – All photos courtesy of Zannah Crowe.

We are all familiar with the standards of the bulb world; Tulips, Daffodils & Crocus. What many people don't realize is that there are scores of



Autumn Crocus
(Colchicum)



Pushkinia



Camassia

other hardy garden bulbs available to the home gardener that can provide bloom from earliest spring through autumn. Many of these underutilized treasures are hardy heirlooms which have been charming gardeners for well over 100 years.

The earliest of the spring bulbs make their appearance in March and April, when northern gardeners are most anxious for color after a long winter. These diminutive super-early bulbs bring much anticipated color to the garden and then very quickly disappear into dormancy, leaving the stage open for the perennials that will follow, with a minimum of unsightly aging foliage. They utilize the early season sun so can be planted in areas that may be full shade after the trees leaf out. I can't recommend this group of bulbs highly enough! Just a few examples include:

Snowdrops (Galanthus):

Dainty hanging cream white flowers in earliest spring, often blooming right through the snow. Heirloom, 1874. Height 4"-6".

Winter Aconite (Eranthus):

Buttercup yellow flowers in April. Heirloom, 1890. Height 3"-4".

Glory-of-the-Snow (Chionodoxa):

Lovely blue, white or pink up-facing flowers with white centers. Heirloom, 1880. Height 3"-6".

Pushkinia (Pushkinia):

Clusters of delicate palest blue flowers with a darker blue stripe. Heirloom, 1805. Height 4"-6".

Siberian Squill (Scilla):

True blue hanging flowers on tiny stems. An enthusiastic



Lycoris

naturalizer. Heirloom, 1795. Height 3"-6".

Spring is abundant with Daffodils and Tulips but once they subside there is still much left of the bulb world. The following bulbs bloom in late May through June.

Ornamental Onion (Allium):

There is a tremendous array of Alliums to choose from, ranging from tiny to immense. All bear globe-like flowers in shades of purple through white and all have a pungent scent and flavor, making them unpalatable to deer. The globe shaped flowers mature into attractive airy round seedheads that we use in dried floral arrangement here at the Farm but

which can also be left standing to add another element of interest to the garden. There are dozens of fascinating Alliums to choose from, and I strongly feel that they are worthy of inclusion in the landscape.

Camassia: Beautiful and underutilized, this little known plant provides a wonderful vertical accent for the late spring/early summer garden with its spires of blue flowers. It is native to northwestern North America, where it grows along streambeds. It is one of the few bulbs that will tolerate wet conditions which would cause other bulbs to rot. Heirloom, 1837. Height 24"-30"

Summer Snowflake (Leucojum):

This cousin of the Snowdrop blooms in June with large pendant ivory bells, edged in green. It is an exquisite plant which imparts a certain subtle beauty that fascinates all who see it. Height 18"-24"

Finally, there are bulbs that bloom in autumn, bringing the growing season full circle.

Lycoris: This bulb, which goes by a plethora of entertaining common names (including Surprise Lily, Magic Lily, Resurrection Lily, Naked Ladies, Hardy Amaryllis and Spider Lily), is an outstanding addition to the late summer & fall garden.

Leafless stems arise in August as if out of nowhere and are topped by large rose-lilac flowers with subtle blue overtones. This is one of those plants that passers-by will stop and knock on your door to ask about! Heirloom, 1890. Height 18"-24".

"Autumn Crocus" (Colchicum):

Huge showy crocus-like flowers in autumn. Visitors have asked if our patch of these in the display garden is real! Quite spectacular in the fall landscape. Height 6"-12"

Crocus speciosus: This true autumn blooming crocus bears elongated lavender flowers and is best planted to emerge through low growing groundcover, which will keep the blossoms upright. Heirloom, 1800. Height 4"-6"

All of these bulbs are hardy and long-lived and many of them naturalize to create drifts of seasonal color. So, rally yourself for just one more gardening task this

season - a small commitment of time and effort this fall will be greatly rewarded for years to come by these low maintenance garden beauties!



Ornamental Onion (Allium)



Summer Snowflake
(Leucojum)



Galanthus (Snowdrops)