

# New Homes

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## Tomorrow I plant the bulbs

### Garden Guru



Garden Guru is a monthly column, featuring advice from landscape designer Mike Pascoe. Ideas, suggestions and information about creating the ideal green space especially for owners of new homes.



Trillium Luteum

The bulb catalogues crossed my desk in June, far distant in my mind at the time when I would have the time to enjoy them and even think about next spring. June for professional horticulturists is something akin to the Indianapolis 500; we zoom from place to place trying to satisfy the needs of the garden and gardener alike.

Bulbs are my favourite group of plants. Such promise arrives in a squat, dry looking package that one cannot imagine what flamboyance will spring forth from such a humble beginning. However even now in September it is still difficult to think of planting something that won't offer its beauty to enthral us for another eight months.

In my career, I have planted over 100,000 bulbs (in other people's gardens). So when the bulb catalogues arrive from the likes of Van Hoff and Bloker, Trade Winds, and Garden Import, I look for the unusual and the unique. I am not particularly fond of tulips, but, my English heritage allows me to run amuck when it comes to daffodils. I have planted some



Tulipa Tarda

sixty thousand of 40 different cultivars in the Cuddy Gardens in Strathroy.

In the hope of encouraging my fellow gardeners to explore new bulb varieties, I will share some of my favourites with you. These gems are available with a little effort and it's not too late to order from suppliers if you cannot resist the temptation.

Muscari latifolium, unfortunately I have not run across a common name for this plant but it will be familiar to us as a close relative of the Common Grape Hyacinth (*Muscari comosum*). *M. latifolium* is a gem because of its two tone blue flower spikes and although not as vigorous as *M. comosum* it will gradually spread and naturalize. Suited to planting in groundcovers such as Sweet woodruff (*Gallium odoratum*) and Deadnettle (*Lamium maculatum* cultivars), the emerging groundcover foliage will hide the ripening bulb foliage once it has flowered. For effect *M. latifolium* is best planted in groups of a dozen or more. Even 100 bulbs are often lost in the average garden, so plant lots.

*Tulipa tarda* is unique among tulips in that its diminutive form absolves it from the master race of showy hybrid tulips which seem to occupy almost every garden in spring. I prefer *T. tarda* over the garden giants since its subtlety is its underlying gracious characteristic. Unlike its flamboyant cousins who decline in vigour from year to year *T. tarda* will slowly naturalize, forming colourful clumps in the spring garden. Like all bulbs that naturalize *T. tarda* should be planted amongst groundcovers so that ripening foliage is hidden. The Common Periwinkle (*Vinca minor*) is one of the best plants used in combination with *T. tarda* since the blue flowers of the periwinkle begin to flower at the same time as *T. tarda*; a blue and yellow combination in the garden is one of the most striking colour contrasts that a gardener can

hope for.

When the Trillium flowers in the local woods in May we admire from a distance but consider it too common to include in our own gardens. However the Yellow Trillium, *Trillium luteum* is a plant worthy of inclusion. The Yellow Trillium is a native species that is endangered in Ontario, I know of only one location where it occurs naturally. That said bulbs, are available from specialised nursery sources that have been commercially propagated and when the plant in my own garden flowers it is a neighbourhood event. Larger in stature than the Common Trillium, the Yellow Trillium prefers semi-moist but well drained rich garden soil. Slow to colonize it should be planted where it will not be disturbed for some years allowing it to develop as a small colony.

I am a daffodil nut, the more the better, and each year my collection grows as new or old cultivars and species are added to both clients and my own garden. Typically when we think of daffodils we remember the large yellow trumpet types that are easy to grow. There are many smaller or dwarf forms and one of the smallest and latest flowering cultivars is *Narcissus Baby Moon*.

*Baby Moon* is a detail plant and is best planted close to walkways and steps where it can be appreciated. It is not a particularly vigorous multiplier and it takes many years to produce a decent clump so start them off in large groups of about fifteen bulbs for full effect. *Baby Moon* prefers lean, well drained soil, and I have even planted it in the gravel edges of paths where it seems to thrive.

Bulbs are a long term investment and a celebration of spring; it is unfortunate that their planting is yet another chore at the end of a long gardening season. We regret the arrival of spring when we look out at the garden and say, "I should have planted some *Muscari* there or a few *Trilliums* under the ferns between the *Hosta*."



Narcissus 'Baby Moon'