

# **TIPS ON GROWING TULIPS FOR CUT FLOWERS:**

## **1. WHEN TO PLANT**

Plant your tulips bulbs in autumn when the soil temperature is below 60° F. Generally speaking, they can be planted once the soil temperatures have cooled down. Here in Western Washington, the second half of September is the earliest one can plant with October being the usual time. Do not try to plant if the soil is saturated with water. Try to plant prior to the chance of night frost.

## **2. STORAGE**

Please open the box immediately upon arrival. Bulbs need to breathe air just like we do! If you are not going to plant them immediately, store them in a dry place with plenty of air circulation, with ideal temperatures of 40-65°F. An unheated garage is a good example. Make sure to plant the bulbs before the ground freezes.

## **3. HOW TO PLANT**

Choose a spot that is mostly sunny or has only light shade. Also make sure that the location has fairly good drainage and does not tend to get waterlogged. If you have heavier soils, such as wet clay, planting the bulbs in raised beds or hills will help improve drainage.

Tulips and iris can be planted at 9 to 12 bulbs per square foot. Larger bulbs and varieties that produce above average foliage may need to be planted at a lower density. Certain varieties will gain in length when planted close together. The closer the plants are, the greater the risk of botrytis.

Dig a hole and place the bulb in the ground, planting the bulb pointed side up. Add 3-4" of soil on top of the bulb and a little extra if you are planting in a location that is susceptible to frost.

## **DISEASE MANAGEMENT:**

Botrytis is the most common disease in tulips. It is a fungus that likes cool, damp, and still air. This means that most places where tulips grow well (for cut flower production) are also the places where botrytis is more common. The disease spreads via spores. The spores can come from other plants in the area, the soil, or bulbs. Plants showing botrytis damage are infected with the disease. Leaving infected plants in with other tulips can lead to the disease spreading to other plants. Leaving infected bulbs or leaves near your tulip fields can also allow the disease to spread.

Each growing year will have a different "disease pressure." Some varieties will be more susceptible to botrytis than others. The more stress a crop is under, the greater the chance that plants can succumb to diseases. The weather can play a big role in whether it will be a "good" or "bad" year for botrytis. Hail can damage the foliage and give botrytis spores a chance to infect a plant.

Things you can do to minimize the risk of a botrytis outbreak:

- Do not plant your bulbs too close together. Remember which varieties have more foliage, and plant those thinner.
- Plant in rows and preferably with the direction that the wind usually blows.

- Scout your fields. If you see a sick plant, pull it out and dispose of it.
- Sanitation. Keep old sick plants, trimmed leaves and bulbs, and old flowers away from your growing fields.
- Crop rotation. Do not plant tulips where you have planted tulips before for at least 3 years.
- Reduce the stress on the bulbs. Do not plant too shallow (you should have 4-5 inches of soil above the noses of the bulb) and plant in well-drained soil.
- One and done. Tulips for cut flowers are essentially a one-year crop. Bulbs that remain in the ground might flower the following year, but they will have a much greater chance at being diseased and the quality will be much worse than the freshly planted bulbs.
- Fungicides. There are fungicides (pesticides used against fungi) that you can buy to help protect your crop and/or stop a botrytis outbreak. Certain fungicides can leave visible residue which, if applied later in the season, will still be noticeable when it is time to pick the flowers. Check with your local pesticide distributors to see what product would work best for your crop. After a heavy hail storm, fungicides are often the only way to protect your crop.



Photos of Botrytis in tulips

