



Summer Bulbs In The Garden

Meet this colorful cast of characters for the summer garden.

By Sally Ferguson

Top-performing summer bulbs make excellent candidates for summer container gardens, garden beds and tropical-style plantings. There are a number of things you can do with bulbs in more than just the spring, and I am not sure the consumers are 100 percent aware of that. The following is a helpful list provided by the U.S. Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center of some of the exciting bulb plants that work really well in the summertime. You can use it to explain how each of them can work in consumers' yards. They are all plants you can showcase when the time comes to let your customers know that summer doesn't have to be a hot season without a lot of color.

Acidanthera

This fragrant plant blooms in late summer. Tall, sturdy-stemmed acidanthera boasts large, nodding, star-shaped, white flowers with a mahogany eye and an appealing sweet fragrance.

Amarcrinum

An amazingly fragrant summer bulb, this stunner blooms late summer until frost. Each bulb produces clusters of up to 16 funnel-shaped, shell-pink flowers atop 2-ft. stems. Amarcrinum is a natural for containers. Best in full sun, it handles partial shade easily. If amaryllis and lilies please you, fragrant amarcrinum — a crossing of *Amaryllis belladonna* and lily-like *Crinum moorei* — is a double delight.

Bananas

Who knew bananas were bulb plants! In fact, these archetypal tropicals grow from corms. Called variously musa, banana, plantain or manilla hemp, the thick-stemmed, broad-leafed towering plants are typically available as ready-grown potted plants or tiny starter plants in 4-inch pots.

Begonias

Luxurious tuberous begonias are made in the shade. Indeed, they are one of the few brilliantly colored summer flowers to bloom all season long in deep shade or filtered sunlight. Superb in containers or in the garden, begonias are low-growing

plants (12-15 inches tall) with large, dense, dramatic flowers with ruffled petals in rich shades of red, yellow, white, champagne, pink or orange.

Caladium

Lush foliage plants with generous, heart-shaped leaves, caladiums are cool and calming. They come in shades of green, white, rose or red in solids, spots, flares or blushes. They excel at "softening edges." Even a bare concrete wall looks more pleasing when caladiums are grouped along the base, their colorful leaves softly swaying in the summer breeze. Caladiums grow 1-3 ft. tall and perform best in shade or partial shade.

Calla Lily

Katherine Hepburn immortalized this flower with the memorable stage-entrance-utterance, "The calla lilies are in bloom again." Hepburn became a star, and the callas did as well. These fabulous summer bloomers were once available primarily in white or pink. Today they also come in red, orange, yellow, rust, lavender, pale green, gold and near black. Their sophisticated, funnel-shaped flowers and pleasing leaves are surprisingly long lasting.

Canna

Tropical-looking cannas are natural vertical accents. Tall and broad-leaved, cannas excel in the garden and as "anchors" in mixed container plantings where the interplay of heights, drape, flowers and foliage can be intricate. They mix nicely with a broad roster of partners, from coleus to petunias, lantana, sweet potato vines and straw flowers. Dwarf (18 inches to 3 ft.) and tall (3-12 ft.) versions are available, with leaves in dashing shades of green, brown, burgundy, black and multicolored stripes. With leaves so dramatic, it's easy to forget that cannas also produce flamboyant flowers.

Bletilla

The small bulbs of the Chinese ground orchid yield an abundance of charming, orchid-like flowers in early summer. Each bulb produces up to 10 clusters of long-lasting magenta, white or pink flowers on small plants under a 1 ft. tall. For a

Top to bottom: Begonia; tigrida; oxalis; calla lily and caladium.
(Photos: U.S. Netherlands Flower Bulb Information Center)



Left to right: Elephant ears; canna; eucomis.

moveable display, plant several to a pot and place in full sun or light shade.

Dahlia

From mid-summer through frost, dahlias take center stage in the garden. There are hundreds to choose from; the color range is sublime. Most dahlias do best in garden beds, but many are superbly suited to pots.

Elephant Ears

With their enormous, elongated, heart-shaped leaves, tropical tubers *Colocasia esculenta*, *alocasia* and *xanthosoma* can transform any small setting into tropical splendor. Group several to create an "island" of green. Different varieties offer different looks, with leaves of green, chartreuse, black or stripes, in heights ranging from 1-6 ft. tall.

Gloriosa Lily

This exotic vining lily splashes the early mid-summer scene with flowers of vivid reddish-orange and yellow and petals so wildly ruffled and reflexed they look rather like tropical birds nesting amidst the leaves. Gloriosa vines want to cling to an upright support; either a trellis or obelisk will do or even another woody vine or shrub. After bloom, fat seed-pods will appear to provide full-season interest.

Lily

Lilies add color and sophistication to the summer garden. Plant in groups of five, six or more. Asiatic lilies are the choice for spunky, mid-summer color, while Oriental lilies provide showier fragrant blooms later in the season.

Eucomis

For a totally cool tufted pineapple effect, pop eucomis bulbs into a pot or garden bed and watch them grow. With their 15-inch spire of tiny greenish-white (or wine colored) flowers atop a base of broad, strappy green leaves, eucomis are unusual and dramatic. Potted eucomis can be kept in the background in early summer then moved forward

for prime viewing during their July and August bloom time. After bloom, eucomis provide a stellar second show, as the dried seed heads are considered by many to be even more gorgeous than the original blossoms.

Oxalis

Also known as shamrocks or wood sorrel, oxalis are low-growing, mounded plants known for their 3- or 4-leaved foliage and nodding flowers of white or pink. Oxalis make a sophisticated under planting for taller plants in containers or the garden. Or plant them in small accent pots. Count on oxalis for intriguing foliage and dainty blooms from late spring through frost. One to consider is the official "good luck plant," an easy-to-grow bulb that produces sprays of small, purplish-red flowers and dramatic 4-leafed-clover leaves marked at the center by a "cross" of dark brownish-burgundy.

Tigridia

Whether called tigridia, Mexican shellflower or tiger flower, this exotic beauty with pleated leaves and brilliantly multi-colored, triangular blossoms thrives in hot, dry, sunny spots. Each blossom sports three broad petals of red, yellow or white fanning from center petals with leopard-spots of contrasting colors (yes, a tiger flower with leopard spots). While each tigridia flower lasts only a day, each plant will bloom heavily throughout many weeks. A pot full of tigridia provides a fun, flamboyant color accent in late summer. 🐆

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Hydrangea

Hydrangea 'Blushing Bride' has white blooms that change to pink blush. Plants grow best in partial shade with moist soil and can reach 3-6 ft. tall. Bailey Nurseries. (651) 768-3444. Write in 1558



Balls of seed

SeedBallz are balls of clay (hand rolled by people with disabilities) loaded with seeds and a mix of organic materials. When placed into the ground in a sunny location, SeedBallz are designed to sprout and create clusters of flowers. Ten percent of all sales of "Seeds of Hope" is donated to women in financial need. SeedBallz. (800) 398-0539. Write in 1570

Argyranthemum

Argyranthemum 'Molimba Mini Yellow' is part of a new series introduced for 2007. The pale-yellow blooms are bred to appear all season long. This plant offers a compact growth habit in addition to strong branching. It is bred to be versatile and heat tolerant. It will reach approximately 10-14 inches high and does best in full sun. Proven Winners. (877) 865-5818. Write in 1569



Hydrangea

'Big Daddy' is available exclusively to independent garden centers. This hydrangea has 12- to 14-inch flower heads and blooms pink in alkaline soil and blue in acidic soil from early summer through fall.



It grows 5- to 6-ft. high and wide. 'Big Daddy' has dark-green foliage and is bred to thrive in hot, humid summers. Novalis. (888) 845-1988. Write in 1567

Aquatic plants

A large selection of aquatic plants including hardy shallow water/marginal plants, lotus, and hardy and tropical water lilies is available to be shipped via second day air. Discount Pond Supplies, Inc. (800) 979-0999. Write in 1561 ▶

