

# Bulbs and Perennials...Hand in Hand

The Backyard Gardeners  
Sept. 2014



## Planting bulbs and perennials in combinations works because:

- They return annually
- Extend the bloom time in the gardens
- Anchor landscapes and enhance each other
- Add contrasting/complementary colors, textures, patterns
- Help you use color to your advantage
- Hide fading bulb foliage

## Best Combinations (researched by Cornell University)

- Tulipa ‘Queen of Night’ with Sedum ‘Matrona’—The purple tulip flowers complement the purple-edged foliage of the sedum and echoes the hues of this dark-leaved sedum. The sedum grows large enough over the season to overtake the old tulip foliage. This combo would be effective with any upright, dark-leaved sedum.
- Allium karataviense ‘Ivory Queen’ with Aster macrophyllus—The allium leaves match the aster foliage nearly perfectly, allowing for the blooms to show with no worry of unattractive foliage. The two plants grow at the same rate and the blooms are still visible.
- Anemone blanda ‘White Splendour’ with Rheum palmatum ‘Atrosanguineum’—The fine white flowers of the anemone contrast well with the dark, coarse foliage of the rheum. The anemone blooms before the leaves of the rheum get too large, and then the rheum grows to cover the old foliage of the anemone. Rheum would be a good companion for many bulbs because of its large leaves..
- Hyacinthus ‘White Pearl’ with Rheum palmatum ‘Atrosanguineum’—Just as the rheum contrasted with and then covered the anemone, it does so for the hyacinth. This combo could be even better if a multiflora or “looser” white hyacinth were used.
- Hyacinthus ‘Jan Bos’ with Penstemon ‘Husker Red’—The emerging penstemon leaves are dark purple just as the hyacinth is blooming, creating a nice color scheme. Many cultivars of hyacinth can be combined with Penstemon ‘Husker Red’. The penstemon is slow enough to allow the hyacinths to finish blooming and reenergize their bulbs, and then takes over before the foliage becomes unsightly.
- Ipheion uniflorum ‘White Star’ with Potentilla argentea—The interesting texture of the newly emerging potentilla leaves makes a complementary surrounding for the blooming ipheion. The potentilla then grows tall to cover the browning leaves of the ipheion.
- Narcissus ‘Fortissimo’ with Papaver orientale ‘Turkenlouis’—An excellent combination since the narcissus flowers above the developing poppy leaves. The leaf texture contrast between the leaves make for an interesting mix, and the fast growth of the papaver covers the narcissus foliage quickly. Any combination of poppy and similarly sized daffodil would work and since the poppy flowers after the daffodil, color is not an issue.

- Narcissus ‘Ice Follies’ with Pulsatilla vulgaris ‘Papageno’—This combination shows contrasting foliage texture, simultaneous blooming times, and perennial foliage to cover the fading bulb foliage. The yellow center of the pulsatilla and the corolla of the Ice Follies are a great color echo. Also, the fuzzy and airy seed heads of the pulsatilla camouflage faded narcissus flowers.
- Narcissus ‘Pink Charm’ with Cimicifuga ramosa ‘Brunette’—The foliage of the cimicifuga complements the narcissus foliage and flowers early in the season. It also grows large enough to mask the browning daffodil leaves. This combo would be especially effective if narcissus were evenly spaced.
- Narcissus ‘Salome’ with Phlox paniculata ‘Bill Baker’—This combination illustrates the use of bulbs with perennials to extend the bloom season. After the narcissi are finished, the phlox explodes with blooms, masking the bulb foliage. This combo would work with many narcissi and probably also with early tulips.
- Narcissus ‘Slim Whitman’ with Achillea filipendulina ‘Gold Palette’—The leaf texture of the emerging achillea offers contrasting texture. The achillea foliage grows tall and thick enough to hide the fading narcissus foliage.
- Tulipa ‘Ballade’ with Geranium ‘Mayflower’—The height of the purple-hued tulip at bloom and the early geranium foliage makes the tulip blooms look as if they are floating in a sea of green. Later, the geranium’s foliage and purple flowers mask the fading tulip leaves.
- Tulipa ‘Don Quichotte’ with Geranium ‘Claridge Druce’—The blooming of the tulip and the growth of the geranium coincide perfectly. The geranium foliage works to mask the tulip leaves as they fade. The pink color of the tulip is echoed by some purpling of the geranium. Another combination, ‘Don Quichotte’ with Geranium pratense ‘Splish Splash’, is similar.
- Tulipa ‘Negrita’ with Stachys byzantine—This combination has extension of the blooming season, contrasting & complementary leaf color and texture, and the right timing for old leaf coverage. The purple tulip is excellent with the grey stachys.
- Tulipa ‘Parade’ with Dicentra spectabilis ‘Alba’—The red blooms of the tulip with the white blooms of the dicentra add charm to the spring garden. As the tulips finish their show, the dicentra continues to bloom for several more weeks.

Cornell’s research site also features suggested combinations of perennials with tulips, narcissi, crocuses and more at <http://www.hort.cornell.edu/combos/>

### **Resources for other combinations:**

- **Better Homes and Gardens article with combinations:**  
<http://www.bhg.com/gardening/design/color/using-the-color-wheel-in-gardening/#page=2>
- **Dig Drop and Done**  
[http://www.digdropdone.com/companion\\_planting/](http://www.digdropdone.com/companion_planting/)