



# MAGIC MEADOWS

Discover how to create your own bulb meadow for next spring, with three expert plans from leading designers

INTRODUCTION VERONICA PEERLESS

**A**t this time of year, as bulb catalogues begin to drop through our letterboxes, many gardeners start thinking ahead to spring when one of the many joys is seeing bulbs emerging, pushing new, fresh green growth up from the cold, winter-hardened ground.

We usually plant bulbs to add layers of interest to pots and ribbons of colour to our borders. But we rarely plant them in our lawns – often the most visible part of the garden in spring, with little grass growth. Many bulbs naturalise very happily in grass, where they will flower for many years to come – making this a sustainable way of planting them.

In the past few years, bulb meadows have been embraced by garden designers. Every April the meadow shown here, for example, erupts into a rainbow of colour. It was created for Villa Pisani

Bolognesi Scalabrin, near Padua in Italy, by Dutch designer Jacqueline van der Kloet, using mostly perennial tulips. The result is one of the most spectacular spring garden sights.

Meanwhile, at Forde Abbey in Somerset, two interconnected swirls were created in an expanse of grass at the edge of the arboretum. Each year bulbs are planted in a trench in November and oversown with Pictorial Meadow seed, which by mid-May has taken over from the bulb displays.

Of course, this is gardening on a very large scale, but a bulb meadow can work in a much smaller space. We asked three leading garden designers to create a display for an area that is just 1m x 1m square, that can be scaled up as needed. Two of the schemes will naturalise over time, providing pleasure for many years, and all will provide a showstopping display for the height of spring. □

Turn the page for meadow plans

JASON INGRAM



### TOP TIP

Wild bees and many butterflies become active at relatively low temperatures in early spring. They have a great need for pollen and nectar. Planting early spring bulbs such as snowdrops, crocus, scilla and grape hyacinths, ideally in large quantities, can contribute to the needs of these hard-working insects.

Narcissi are some of the best bulbs for naturalising in grass, able to cope with damp soil, and flower from March to May

# 1 NATURALISTIC STYLE



ROSANNA CASTRINI

by Carien van Boxtel

Carien van Boxtel is a landscape and garden designer based in the Netherlands. She has created several large bulb displays for the annual bulb festival at Keukenhof for Dutch bulb Company JUB Holland and has also created a bulb meadow in her own garden in Zaltbommel.

## A brief overview of the planting scheme

I designed this bulb meadow scheme to be planted into grassy public spaces in the Utrecht area. It looks good from February to mid May. It is naturalistic and ephemeral in style and uses many native choices as well as plants that in the Netherlands we call *stinzen*: spring flowers, mostly bulbs, introduced many years ago that grow semi-wild in some historic landscape gardens. The popularity of *stinzen* is rising among garden designers as they are beautiful and sustainable, having survived for hundreds of years. The soil in the Utrecht locations is relatively damp and rich in nutrients, especially phosphate, potassium and lime, and not too high in nitrogen: perfect for most naturalising bulbs. I always aim for a bulb scheme to start flowering at the end of winter with delicate winter aconites and snowdrops (preferably two varieties as this will prolong the flowering period). Crocuses will follow soon after, at varying times.

I love to mix bigger and 'louder' species (*Crocus vernus* or *Crocus flavus*) with the more delicate species, such as *Crocus tommasinianus* or pastel-coloured *Crocus chrysanthus*. By mid March other bulbs will pop up as the crocuses are finishing: scillas, grape hyacinths, fritillaries, scillas and pushkinias. Narcissi are some of the best bulbs for naturalising in grass, able to cope with damp soil, they're deer and rabbit resistant and a range will flower from March to mid May. Pops of further late colour come from beautiful species tulips.

## Carien's tips on planting a bulb meadow

- Make a bulb-planting list in which you take flowering periods, colour, height, foliage, scent and quantities into account.
- 'Right plant right place' applies to bulbs as well: some bulbs love warm, sunny conditions, others prefer shade or semi-shade.
- More is more: better to plant too many bulbs than too few.
- Bulbs are relatively hungry plants: make sure that your soil is healthy, a bit chalky, airy, full of life, with a pH of 7 or more. I top dress my lawn every year in late autumn with a thin layer of home-made compost, right after planting the bulbs. A feed of organic seaweed or other potassium-rich fertiliser during the growing season is recommended.
- Drainage is key: clay, ideally mixed with grit, is fine for most bulbs as long as it is not too compact; add organic matter to poor, sandy soils.
- Every bulb needs at least six weeks after flowering to die back before mowing. In most cases, the leaves lift off with no resistance. If you can't delay mowing, use species that flower from January to mid March, or plant them in out-of-the-way grassy areas, under trees or in woodland areas where you can allow the grass to grow longer.
- To enjoy early flowering bulbs in grass from February you need to do a late mow in November to keep grass low before regrowth starts.
- Plant naturalising bulbs under trees with leaves that break down quickly, such as hazel, ash, or fruit trees.
- For bigger areas or hard soil, try a foot-powered, long-handled bulb planter or a drill. For large areas, you can hire a bulb-planting machine.

CARIEN VAN BOXTEL

## Carien's plant list

### *Eranthis hyemalis* Cilicica Group

**10 bulbs** I always start at the end of winter with this delicate flower. Its cheerful, bright-yellow flowers are attractive to early flying pollinators. Flowers February – March. 10cm x 10cm. RHS H6<sup>1</sup>.

### *Galanthus elwesii* 10 bulbs

A reliable, early flowering, large snowdrop. The flowers have two green spots on the inner petals. February – March. 20cm x 10cm. AGM<sup>2</sup>. RHS H5, USDA 4a-7b.

***Galanthus nivalis* 15 bulbs** The fragrant, common snowdrop, used to prolong interest.

February – March. 20cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-7b.

### *Crocus tommasinianus* 'Barr's Purple' 25 bulbs

One of the earliest crocuses to flower. The flowers are lilac-purple with orange stamens. February – March. 10cm x 5cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Crocus angustifolius* 10 bulbs

Bright-yellow flowers with burgundy feathering. Scented. February – March. 10cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Crocus flavus* 5 bulbs

Bright-yellow, goblet flowers. February – April. 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Crocus* 'Gipsy Girl' 15 bulbs

Large, fragrant, yellow flowers with stunning purple stripes on outer petals. February – March. 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Muscari latifolium* 15 bulbs

The two-tone flowers are blue-black at the base and pale violet at the tip. The flowers are sterile so will not set seed. March. 20cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Muscari azureum* 15 bulbs

This grape hyacinth has azure blue flowers that are lightly scented. It is particularly good in meadows as it flowers early and has less foliage than most muscari. March and April. 10cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

### *Narcissus* 'February Gold'

**15 bulbs** A good early daffodil for grass. Good alternatives are 'W.P. Milner' with a pale-cream trumpet and near-white petals, or taller 'Sailboat' (40cm), with lemon trumpets and swept-back petals. February – April. 30cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

### *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*

**25 bulbs** I use this wild native or *Narcissus obvallaris*, both of which self seed. Availability can be a problem so I often substitute with the shorter 'Topolino' (15cm). March – April. 30cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

### *Tulipa turkestanica* 15 bulbs

One of the best tulips for grass, which flowers year after year. Its white blooms have a stroke of silver-grey on the outer petals. March – April. 30cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H5.

### *Fritillaria meleagris* 15 bulbs

The snake's head fritillary is widely naturalised in the UK. Distinctive, nodding, chequerboard flowers in March and April. 40cm x 8cm. AGM. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Scilla sardensis* 20 bulbs

Nodding, deep-blue flowers with white centres in March and April. 10cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6.

### *Scilla siberica* 20 bulbs

The Siberian squill has nodding, bell-shaped flowers and slender, leaves in March and April. 20cm x 5cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 2a-8b.

### *Puschkinia scilloides* var.

***libanotica* 20 bulbs** Star-shaped white flowers with a blue stripe in March and April. 10cm x 5cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

### *Leucojum aestivum* 15 bulbs

Pendent flowers, like giant snowdrops. Needs a wet spot. March – May. 50cm x 10cm. RHS H7, USDA 4a-8b.

***Tulipa sylvestris* 10 bulbs** The queen of all tulips is not always easy as a naturalising bulb but once you have seen her golden crown on slender bent stems you will be hooked. April. 30cm x 20cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

### *Narcissus* 'Actaea' 15 bulbs

Beautiful pheasant's eye cultivar. April – May. 45cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

### *Narcissus* 'Hawera' 25 bulbs

A later-flowering daffodil that has moon yellow, swept-back petals. April – May. 20cm x 5cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

### *Narcissus poeticus* var. *recurvus*

**15 bulbs** The most elegant of all daffodils. Include for flowers in May, if you can resist mowing until then. 35cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.



# 2 BOLD AND BRILLIANT



by Jo Thompson

Jo Thompson is one of the UK's top garden designers and plantswomen, winning multiple medals at RHS Chelsea Flower Show. She is passionate about bulbs and the colour effects they can create, and is the author of *The Gardener's Palette* (Timber Press, £35).

## A brief overview of the planting scheme

This bulb meadow was created as part of the planting scheme for the Bell Inn in Ticehurst, East Sussex. It was designed to peak in April and May, with early interest provided by daffodils. The showstopper of the whole scheme is *Fritillaria imperialis* 'Orange Beauty' (crown imperial). Its dusty-orange bells create enormous flowerheads that hover above everything else.

*Anemone coronaria* 'Mister Fokker' provides a haze of blue in the background. Blue plays an important role in the way it makes a garden seem to recede – you can just see how it does that here with its smudge of violet-grey sidling off and away into the distance. Having come out early, the light but not white shades of the narcissi add to that idea of a meadow that is naturalistic, rather than full of formal bands of colours. Here, we have *Narcissus* 'British Gamble', *Narcissus* 'Reggae', *Narcissus* 'Furbelow' and *Narcissus* 'Blushing Lady', with buttery yellow petals or pink trumpets to pick up the yellows in the *Fritillaria imperialis* 'Orange Beauty'.

The crown imperial, the bride of the show, gave the cue for the types of tulips I needed to choose. In another deep, warm rich colour, is *Tulipa* 'Antraciet' in the most sumptuous of crimsons and reds, scattering a touch of bold across the scheme. Her double flowers are strong enough to hold their own against the fritillary's orange forms, and that's all the bold I need.

Some gentle pastel was needed to relieve the whole thing and tie up and in with the daffodils. *Tulipa* 'Poco Loco' and *Tulipa* 'Apricot Impression' bring this pastel in well, the pinks tones in their petals highlighted by their companions. *Tulipa* 'Aafke' does have a touch of lilac in it, which in theory might make me question its proximity to the fritillary, but I was pretty sure that *Tulipa* 'Antraciet' and the blue anemone would make it feel welcome. I've also popped in *Tulipa* 'Big Love' for some proper pink.

There are still yet more flowers from bulbs to come. The giant bluebell-like camassia will start to send up spires as the tulips fade: I've planted *Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii* Caerulea Group, and after that, the alliums will have their moment.

## Jo's tips on planting a bulb meadow

- In November I mix the bulbs in trugs, and then I scatter and plant them where they fall.
- If I'm stripping the turf back, I'll cover the bulbs with chicken wire to protect them from hungry squirrels, and then I cover with soil, upping the quantities of bulbs to get as much of a feeling of coverage as possible.
- If you have deer, they will also eat your tulips. So I would bump up the allium and narcissus quantities as they can't bear either of these.
- I top up this scheme every year, although some bulbs, especially the narcissi, will come back.
- Deadheading is essential.

## Jo's plant list

*Anemone coronaria* 'Mister Fokker' **5 bulbs** The colour blue performs an extremely important job in the way it makes a garden seem to recede. And with this beautiful anemone you get a wonderful smudge of violet blue to grey sidling off and away into the distance. It bears large, cup-shaped, violet-blue flowers that have black centres. The flowers float above attractive, finely toothed, mid-green foliage. Soak the tubers overnight before planting. Flowers March – April. 25cm x 20cm. RHS H5, USDA 7a-10b<sup>1</sup>.

*Narcissus* 'Blushing Lady' **5 bulbs** The daintiness of this daffodil makes it an absolute essential for me when I'm designing bulb meadows. Small enough to have a hint of wildness, it naturalises fabulously. March – April. 30cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

*Narcissus* 'British Gamble' **3 bulbs** An early flowering daffodil that has huge and distinctive, pale flowerheads. Pastel peaches and pinks into lemon, and then folding out to white. These are also great for cutting, if you can bring yourself to do so. March – April. 45cm x 20cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

*Narcissus* 'Furbelow' **5 bulbs** Frills and furbelows – this daffodil has them all, with rich egg-yolk tones singing out the sunniness of springtime. And a sweet fragrance. March – April. 40cm x 20cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

*Narcissus* 'Reggae' **3 bulbs** Elegant and chic. This daffodil's pale-pink centres are just enough to pick up the oranges of *Fritillaria imperialis* 'Orange Beauty' (shown right). It has ivory-white, flared and swept-back petals. March – April. 50cm x 10cm. AGM\*. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

*Tulipa* 'Antraciet' **7 bulbs** The most sumptuous of crimsons and reds, scattering a touch of bold across the scheme. The double flowers are strong and bold enough to hold their own against the orange of the crown imperial. April. 45cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

*Fritillaria imperialis* 'Orange Beauty' **3 bulbs** This crown imperial (shown right) is definitely the star of the show in the meadow at the Bell Inn. Dusty-orange bells create enormous flowerheads that hover above everything else in a very satisfying manner. April – May. 90cm x 30cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-8b.

*Tulipa* 'Aafke' **3 bulbs** The flowers of 'Aafke' have a touch of lilac in their petals, strong enough to form a good point of almost Schiaparelli pink. April – May. 30cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

*Tulipa* 'Apricot Impression' **3 bulbs** I also use this for its pastel hues – the pink petals are blushed with a soft salmon orange. It is a Darwin Hybrid Group tulip with large flowers and sturdy stems that stand up well to poor weather. April – May. 50cm x 15cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

*Tulipa* 'Big Love' **3 bulbs** Large, dusky-pink flowers on stems nearly 60cm tall pick up the tones of 'Aafke' and echo them at height. A barnstorming performance all round. April – May. 60cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

*Tulipa* 'Poco Loco' **3 bulbs** This tulip cultivar brings in some much-needed gentle pastel. The pink tones of the petals are highlighted by their companions. It is a Fosteriana tulip, with a large flowerhead. April – May. 40cm. RHS H4, USDA 3a-8b.

*Allium hollandicum* 'Purple Sensation' **9 bulbs** An allium that seems to be everywhere at the moment but one that never fails to delight. Its improbable bobbles of purple and violet look wonderful dotted through the scheme, and are followed by striking seedheads. May. 50cm x 20cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-9b.

*Camassia leichtlinii* subsp. *suksdorfii* Caerulea Group **5 bulbs** These giant bluebell-like camassias will start to send up spires as the tulips fade. Bees love them too. May. 50cm x 20cm. RHS H4, USDA 5a-9b.

### TOP TIP

Squirrels will do anything to get their paws on a tulip. If I'm planting into grass, after covering with chicken wire, I'll replace the turf as well as I can – squirrels are masters at spotting disturbed ground, so leave no trace. Scattering dead leaves seems to put off the less sharp of the species.

The showstopper is the crown imperial; its dusty-orange bells create enormous flowerheads that hover above everything else



<sup>1</sup>Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. <sup>2</sup>Hardiness ratings given where available.

KATY DONALDSON



**TOP TIP**

Many of the bulbs will require deadheading after flowering, with their foliage left so that the leaves send energy back into the bulb for next year's display. Or leave the flowers to set seed, which will spread about to help with the naturalisation process.



*Fritillaria elwesii*.

*Narcissus bulbocodium* 'White Petticoat'.



*Tulipa humilis* 'Persian Pearl'.



*Tulipa sylvestris*.



*Tulipa cretica* 'Hilde'.



*Tulipa aximensis*.



*Tulipa humilis* 'Helene'.



*Tulipa saxatilis* (Bakeri Group) 'Lilac Wonder'.



*Anemone blanda* 'White Splendour'.



*Crocus* 'Pickwick'.



*Muscari azureum*.



*Iris tuberosa*.

# 3 JEWEL COLOURS



by Tom Eaglestone

Tom Eaglestone is associate landscape designer at Arne Maynard Garden Design. He is a plant enthusiast with a passion for bulbs and a keen gardener. Here, he has created an entirely new planting scheme exclusively for *Gardens Illustrated* readers.

## A brief overview of the planting scheme

For this bulb meadow, I have selected either species bulbs or those that are naturalistic in their appearance and will happily naturalise in grass over time. I have aimed for a jewel-like effect, bringing a much-needed splash of colour at a time of year when we are all craving it. I have also chosen bulbs that will stay relatively neat in habit, providing a carpeted display when fully naturalised.

The fritillary is an absolute must-have and works so well with the narcissi and muscari I have chosen. The cultivars of *Narcissus bulbocodium* (several are available in addition to the one I have selected) are the most delicate, beautiful bulbs and always turn heads. *Crocus biflorus* 'Blue Pearl', with its splash of yellow at the bottom of the petals, works really well with the narcissi and *Tulipa sylvestris*. You could extend the display by adding snowdrops and aconites for late winter and alliums for colour into early summer.

## Tom's tips on planting a bulb meadow

- Order bulbs mid-to-late summer for autumn delivery – especially for the rarer, hard to come by bulbs.
- Have a supply of organic, peat-free compost to hand if necessary – you may feel you want to slightly improve the soil when you begin to create planting holes.
- Ensure you have a good supply of grit for adding to the mix.
- Tools required may include a bulb-planting auger or a bulb planter that removes a clod of soil and turf for planting your bulb into.
- Select a well-drained patch of turf, with a good level of sunlight throughout the day.
- Mix the dry bulbs together and distribute them by hand over the area you would like to develop, then plant them where they land. This will help create a naturalistic effect and will ensure you have an even spread of textures and colours.
- A good rule of thumb is to plant bulbs three times as deep as their height, so depending on the bulb, you might need to dig a slightly deeper hole.
- Try mixing the special crocus bulbs with the more common *Crocus tommasinianus*, which will naturalise quicker, leaving lovely clumps of the more unusual choices. This will in time look very natural.
- You can extend the seasonal interest of the display by adding snowdrops or winter aconites for an early display or some *Allium* cultivars to extend the colour into late May and early June.
- Some of the bulbs will naturalise quicker than others helping to further create a naturalistic appearance to the display.
- Many bulbs are toxic to humans if ingested, so be mindful if planting with children and take care to wash your hands after planting.

## READER OFFER

*Gardens Illustrated* readers can save 15 per cent on organically grown, naturalising bulbs from [organicbulbs.com](http://organicbulbs.com). See page 114 for details.

## Tom's plant list

**Iris 'George' 5 bulbs** In my opinion, the most beautiful of the reticulated iris, often one of the first of the spring bulbs to flower. Flowers February – March. 10-12cm x 10cm. AGM\*. RHS H7, USDA 5a-9b<sup>1</sup>.

**Iris tuberosa 5 bulbs** Commonly known as the snake's head iris, this beauty has a very detailed flower that demands to be inspected close up. It looks great when naturalised and works well early in the season alongside snowdrops. February – March. 20-30cm x 50cm. RHS H5, USDA 5a-9b.

**Crocus 'Pickwick' 5 bulbs** This large crocus naturalises slower than its cousin *Crocus tommasinianus*, so looks great mixed in clumps with the latter. A popular cultivar for good reason, with stripy petals that open each day for a wonderful display. February – March. 10-20cm x 3cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

**Crocus biflorus 'Blue Pearl' 13 bulbs** The delicate flowers can get battered by winter weather, but the colour at this time of year is worth the risk. A wonderful foil for brighter bulbs. February – March. 5-10cm x 5cm. RHS H6, USDA 4b-10a.

**Fritillaria elwesii 3 bulbs** One of the lesser-grown fritillaries, with gorgeous foliage and majestic, but neat, stems of dark brown and green-petalled flowers. It looks fantastic against a white-flowering bulb. March – April. 30-35cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

**Tulipa humilis 'Helene' 7 bulbs** Easy to grow either as part of a meadow mix, or in pots. The flowers are a truly gorgeous pink and very reliable. March – April. 10-20cm x 10cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

**Muscari azureum 5 bulbs** This delicate, species grape hyacinth has the added bonus of being deer and rabbit resistant. March – April. 10cm x 10cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 5a-8b.

**Narcissus bulbocodium 'White Petticoat' 13 bulbs**

I love all the hoop-petticoat species daffodils but this is a

particular favourite. Its delicate, thin foliage offsets clusters of pure-white flowers, which contrast perfectly with *Tulipa humilis* 'Persian Pearl'. March – April. 10-15cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

**Anemone blanda 'White Splendour' 13 bulbs** A woodland favourite. Its simple, but beautiful flowers look lovely when naturalised, which only takes a year or two to achieve. March – June. 5-10cm x 20cm. AGM. RHS H6, USDA 4a-8b.

**Tulipa humilis 'Persian Pearl' 5 bulbs** Looks best before the flower even opens. The yellow centre makes the deep purple even more vibrant. Naturalises easily. Add plenty of grit when planting. April – May. 15cm x 7cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

**Tulipa sylvestris 5 bulbs** No garden should be without this understated, species tulip, unless you really don't like yellow. It has a gentle, citrusy fragrance, which adds to the spring interest. April – May. 30cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

**Tulipa cretica 'Hilde' 7 bulbs** This unusual Cretan tulip can withstand the winter cold of the UK. Its dusky pink and pale-cream flowers are small but pack a punch. April – May. 10-20cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

**Tulipa saxatilis (Bakeri Group) 'Lilac Wonder' 5 bulbs** Particularly great in the morning and evening light. Looks stunning with *Tulipa* 'Helene', especially when naturalised in large groups. April – May. 10-20cm x 10cm. RHS H6, USDA 3a-8b.

**Erythronium dens-canis 'Lilac Wonder' 5 bulbs** An absolute beauty that looks great when naturalised. Great for pollinators. April – May. 20-30cm x 10cm. RHS H5, USDA 3a-8b.

**Tulipa agenensis 3 bulbs** This wild tulip species originated in France. It flowers a little higher than the other tulips in this mix, bringing a pop of colour to the scheme towards the end of the flowering period. May. 30-40cm x 10-20cm. USDA 3a-8b.

TORIE CHLUGG, ADRIAN JAMES, VISIONS PREMIUM, CHRIS BURROWS, HEATHER EDWARDS (GELDENHOF GARDENS, HOLLAND), RICHARD BLOOM, MAXINE ADCOCK / ALL GARDEN PHOTOS: JASON INGRAM; 6 RM FLORAL / ALAMY STOCK PHOTO

<sup>1</sup>Holds an Award of Garden Merit from the Royal Horticultural Society. Hardiness ratings given where available.