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The Daily Telegraph



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Nothing beats tulips for radiant spring colour – and now you can get them in the post

Bring on the tulips for a joyful jolt of colour

The resurgence of British flower farming is a cause for celebration, says Madeleine Howell

Lincolnshire has long been famed for its flowers – tulips, in particular – and has strong ties to Holland's world-famous flower trade. Dutch growers have historically settled on the flat, fertile coastal plains of eastern England. My grandmother, Stella Read (née Maud Sutterby), who we lost to Covid-19 this time last year, was the only child of tulip farmers and bulb growers from Spalding, who also grew potatoes, daffodils and tomatoes.

Instead of marrying her Dutch flower grower fiancé as her parents had hoped, my grandmother met my grandfather at the Victory Services Club in Marble Arch and moved to London. But this spring, in Stella's memory, I've been seeking out seasonal British flowers – a more eco-friendly and conscious choice than buying imported flowers, with no shipping miles (or inconvenient import duties) attached.

Stella was a larger-than-life character who loved



▲ L-R: Neville, Stephen, Jo and Edward Munson of Smith & Munson

rally driving, and for me, Lincolnshire tulips spark a romantic vision of her in her youth at the wheel of one of her beloved vintage John Deere tractors, and attending the Spalding Flower Parade at the height of its popularity in the 1950s and 1960s. At that time, a 30-40 mile-long circular "tulip route" rewarded motorists with views of the tulip fields.

Naturally marshy and originally consisting of fresh and saltwater wetlands, similar to areas in the Netherlands, the Fens boast rich ecology and biodiversity. Drained centuries ago by the Dutch-born British engineer Sir Cornelius Vermuyden, it's a low-lying region around the coast of the Wash, spanning parts of Lincolnshire, Cambridgeshire and Norfolk.

Family-run flower farms still grow tulips in Spalding, a market town on the River Welland

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Gardening

TULIPS FOR BEGINNERS *All you need to know, by Val Bourne*

As any experienced gardener will tell you, tulips are indispensable because they bridge the gap between spring and summer. They flower when the garden's bathed in soft light, just as the first foliage of the year begins to expand, and you don't need to spend a fortune. A well-placed container or two will lift a garden, like a rainbow of hope illuminating a Pre-Raphaelite painting by Sir John Everett Millais.

WHEN TO ORDER
Many newbie gardeners can't understand why, when gardens are full of tulips, they can't buy them in the garden centre. OK, you may find a few in pots that you can quickly tuck into a container or even the ground for instant colour but, as with all spring bulbs, the work starts a year ahead. So, plan now for a beautiful spring 2022.

SEEK INSPIRATION
Gather inspiration by visiting a local tulip festival (see right), armed with a notebook. Or visit a garden open for the National Garden Scheme (ngs.org.uk). Bulb catalogues will be rattling through your letter box in a mere three months' time – so be ready for them.

ORDER EARLY
Use a specialist supplier and order early (August if you're really keen), because the most popular tulips sell out quickly. There's never enough of 'La Belle Epoque', a double blend of toffee, raspberry 'rings' and spice; 'Brown Sugar', a tulip that fades to demerara-gold, is another one that flies out.

SHOP SAVVY
Shop around for the best price. Bulb sizes do differ – if size is specified, anything around 11/12 is a good size. Limit your choices and buy 50 or more, because that's far more economical and you'll get greater visual impact.

PLANT LATE
Tulips need to be planted as autumn fades into winter in order to avoid a fungal disease called tulip fire (*Tulipia tulipae*). Early November is prime time, but you can push it into late

IN POTS

The big advantage with pots is that they are a moveable feast. If spring delivers hot days, tulips go over quickly. If they're in pots, you're able to shuffle them into the shade.

I favour rugged oak half barrels because they don't blow over and they're just the right height. Pack in plenty of bulbs and layer them once the pot is half full of compost, by pressing bulbs into the gaps between the lower layers. Wire mesh the pots, because hungry mice and squirrels adore a tulip snack.

If you're using a colour mix, stick to three varieties designed to give you three weeks of flower, and mix them up before planting. Single varieties in one pot work well, too.

Ornate, heavy-headed tulips have a habit of swooning so are best in a pot. The feathery parrot tulip 'Rococo' is an ornate red, with buds that look like fledgling birds. 'Negrita Parrot' (also sold as 'Secret Parrot') is a flouncy purple; 'Amazing Parrot' reminds me of a swirling pink and gold sari.

Doubles are equally divine and 'Black Hero', the double form of 'Queen of Night', forms sooty "artichokes" that persist for much of May.



December. Some suppliers will hold your order until convenient – so if you don't have a cool, mouse-free place to store bulbs, ask your supplier to send

them in mid-October and plant immediately.

HOW TO PLANT
Plant bulbs at least twice their own depth. The easiest

tool is still a hand trowel in my opinion, although if you've hundreds to do (and you're a tool-tester type) there are drill attachments, called augers, for the brave.

TIME IT RIGHT
Opt for late April and May varieties, that flower in traditional tulip time, although there are exceptions to the rule.

'Daydream', a sunset-inspired Darwin; 'Princess Irene', a muted purple-flamed hot orange; and 'Orange Emperor', a soft orange with a pistachio-

green eye, all perform in the first half of April and kick start the season.

TULIP TYPES
Make Triumph tulips your

mainstay because these slightly shorter tulips, which flower in the second half of April, have been highly bred for the cut flower market. Strong stems

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in the South Holland district of Lincolnshire, today. One is the fifth-generation firm of Smith & Munson, established in 1949, which recently began delivering tulips directly to people's doors in recyclable cardboard tubes, with personalised messages. Before the pandemic, Smith & Munson supplied florists and retailers only.

Their client list is a roll-call of the great and the good in floristry, including celebrated florists such as Philippa Craddock (Prince Harry and Meghan Markle's wedding florist); Simon J. Lyett (who did the flowers for the Prince of Wales and the Duchess of Cornwall's wedding); Shane Connolly & Co (the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge's wedding florist); Philip Hammond, florist at The Dorchester hotel; Paula Pryke in London; and Yorkshire-based Sarah Richardson at Leafy Couture.

"We'd wanted to start selling bunches directly to people's homes for

As they bloom in spring, tulips also symbolise rebirth, life changes and new adventures

a while, but we hadn't got to it. Then when everything closed, we had to get the ball rolling. We were terrified we wouldn't be able to sell our flowers otherwise," explains Jo Munson, 52, who joined the family business when she married Stephen Munson, 56. From parrot and fringed varieties to double-flowered, peony-like types, Smith & Munson's covetable tulips are hand-planted and hand-picked in Lincolnshire. They are currently at their peak – the season runs from mid-December through to May.

"Our family have been here since the early 1900s," Jo tells me. "The site started out as a smallholding. There were a lot of smallholders – it was just how people lived in the countryside. In the 1950s, the Dutch were looking for new markets and selling so many bulbs here that it just took off. There was nowhere near the variety there is now, but red and yellow 'Apeeldoorn' tulips were popular.

"There's still a thriving tulip growing industry here and more tulips grow than ever, but by the fewer growers, mostly on a larger scale. Not every generation wants to carry on, and there was a huge campaign to promote



Dutch flowers, with the slogan 'if it ain't Dutch it ain't much'.

"The Dutch dominate the global market and they're very good at what they do, but we hung on in there," says Jo. Today, Smith & Munson grow around nine million tulips a year, under five acres of glass.

"In Holland, they still grow fields of tulips [just] for the bulbs. We grow all of ours hydroponically, under glass and in water to save a cut flower, rather than for bulbs. There's no pesticides needed."

Outside of tulip season, from June until December, Smith & Munson grow just under 1.5 million lilies, including LA hybrid lilies, oriental trumpet lilies and pollen-free double rose lilies.

"It was an adjustment for me, marrying into a flower farming family. My father was a bank manager, and worked 9-5 with weekends off. It was very different to tulip growing, a seven-day-a-week job during the season. It's easier with the lilies, which are slower growing.

"Now our three children have grown up, it's easier. Our eldest, Edward, 26, is here with us and is the driving force. He studied agri-business at Harper Adams University in Shropshire, spent a year in Holland working with Dutch flower

▲ Raspberry and cream: double-flowered 'Columbus' with peony-like flowers; below, Madeleine's great grandparents, who farmed tulips in Spalding, Lincolnshire

growers, and then came back full of innovative ideas."

Pastel colours and pinks have been popular this year, says Jo, particularly 'Flash Point' double pink tulips. With silver lining around the edge of the leaf, they start as a striped pink, white and green bud in the vase, and then burst into bright cerise pink in a mass of pet-



als. "Columbus" tulips are my favourites – cupped, large peony-shaped, pink double two-tone tulips with pointed raspberry petals edged in cream," she says.

"This year, we also introduced the increasingly popular 'White Liberstar', a crown or coronet tulip, which is an unusual, delicate shape. Sharing our tulips on social media and becoming 'a brand' is helping us to move into an exciting new age of British flower growing. More people are buying them for everyday enjoyment, as well as just for special occasions. In future, I hope we can run more open days, with lunches in the glasshouse, tours of the nursery and floral arrangement demos.

"It's amazing to see a resurgence in people growing their own flowers and running smallholdings. People who wouldn't previously have bothered are getting back in touch with nature and appreciating the small things in life. Before, we were all too busy rushing around to stop and look at the flowers."

Numerous other flower farmers still operate in the Spalding area today, including Lamb's Flowers, and Jack Buck Farms, a specialist grower of daffodils, fennel and celeriac.

There are many more: the photographer Tessa Bunney is particularly interested in the history of cut flower production in Lincolnshire, and her series *The Flower Fields* documents the lives and work of flower farmers there today (tessabunney.co.uk).

The most commonly referenced meaning of spirit-lifting tulips is "deep and perfect love." Florist Bloom & Wild describes them as a way to express unconditional love. As they bloom in spring, tulips also symbolise rebirth, life changes and new adventures. When the country opens up, I can't wait to visit the Fens in memory of Siella's connection to Spalding tulips. In the meantime, I'll be strewing pastel-coloured, lipstick-pink and sunshine yellow posies everywhere, and sending them to the people I love.

20 single tulips, £20; 20 special tulips, £25, incl. postage; 10 lilies from £30, minimum four buds per stem. Weekly, fortnightly and monthly subscriptions are available; smithandmunson.com



Gardening newsletter

Sign up now for our weekly mailout, full of green-fingered news and ideas > telegraph.co.uk/gardening-nl

SHOP IT

Three of the best vases for displaying tulips



Polis Potten Roman vases, set of four, £140
"Make the ordinary more extraordinary" nisliving.co.uk



Peacock tulip vase, £68
An enchanting ceramic "tulipiere" for single stems. mitalice.com



Bottle bud vases, £35
Suspended vases with antique brass finish. grahamandgreen.co.uk



Colour code

► Don't sprinkle colours like dolly mixtures – pick a theme. Bear in mind that whites look cool in semi-shade, but stark in glaring sun. The two classic whites, 'Spring Green' and 'White Triumphator', still reign supreme.

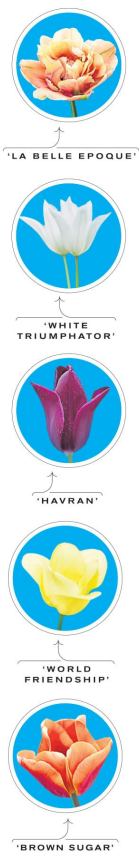
► Dark tulips disappear in shade, but they inject drama to warm colour blends. 'Havran', 'Jan Reus', 'Paul Scherer' and 'Queen of Night' are all good with soft, earth-toned tulips, such as 'Apricot Fox' and 'Brown Sugar' and 'Cairo'. Any dark tulip needs a contrast.

► Tulips are rarely one single shade. Always look at the detail in the petals as these are clues for planting partners. The rich red 'Couleur Cardinal' has a purple-blue shimmer, while warm orange 'Hermitage' has purple and green shading. Pinks are tricky, because they are warm or cool and don't mix well. I have never yet successfully placed 'Menton', with its over-large, pearlescent flowers. 'Missress' is an easier shimmering pink. 'Barcelona' is a good strident pink and 'Don Quichotte' a cherry pink.

► Don't be afraid of sumptuous colours – they flatter spring green foliage enormously and can be used as stand-alone varieties. 'National Velvet' and 'Attila Graffiti' both have a touch of sealing-wax red that's capable of lifting a spring day – gloomy or not.

► If you go for yellow, make it a soft one that blends with blackcurrants and purples. Good yellows are rare, but 'First Proud', 'World Friendship' and 'Ivory Floradale' are all excellent.

► A bit too chic for country gardens, but if you want style in spades, go for 'Gavota', 'Slava', 'Marilyn' and 'Ballade'. They're as sharp as a well-cut suit.



TOP FOR TULIPS

- Arundel Castle, Kent (arundelcastle.org)
- Constable Burton, N. Yorks (constableburton.com)
- Calke Abbey, Derbys (nationaltrust.org.uk)
- Coughton Court, Warwicks (nationaltrust.org.uk)
- Hever Castle, Kent (hevercastle.co.uk)
- Morton Hall, Worcs (mortonhallgardens.co.uk)
- Nostell, W. Yorks (nationaltrust.org.uk)
- Waddesdon, Bucks (waddesdon.org.uk)
- West Park, Beds (english-heritage.org.uk)
- Pashley Manor, E. Sussex (pashleymanorgardens.com)

Specialist bulb suppliers

- Peter Nyssen (peternyssen.com; 0161 747 4000)
- Blooms Bulbs (bloomsbulbs.com; 0123 470 9099)
- Sarah Raven (sarahraven.com; 0345 092 0283)
- Riverside Bulbs (riversidebulbs.co.uk; 0144 974 1551)
- Avon Bulbs (avonbulbs.co.uk; 0146 024 2177)

keep them nearby where you can assess them. I'm itching to get my hands on the dark-stemmed, silver-pink 'Jacuzzi', a new viridiflora called 'Orange Marmalade' and the pink-edged white 'Diamond Jubilee'. I look for well-behaved foliage too.

IN THE BORDER

The classic combination of the calendula-orange 'Ballarina', purple 'Negrita' and mottled white 'Shirley' is widely planted because it's so pleasing. 'Shirley' opens cream and takes three days to begin to get purple tints, so don't panic. I did it. A cluster of tulips is a good marker for late perennials. I surround pink and white bell-shaped tulips with 'Barcelona' to mark the spot. Don't sulky your tulip displays with fading daffodils, segregate them.

CUTTING GARDEN

For the cutting garden, it's worth using a ready-blended mixture of interesting colours and flower forms that you won't find in a supermarket. Cut them as the buds begin to open. Double flowers last longest; they include 'La Belle Epoque', 'Black Hero' and 'Antracite'.

support robust, egg-shaped flowers and the weather-resistant petals hold their shape so flowers last longer. Add in taller, May-flowering varieties and

you'll get four weeks of interest, plus a more natural look created by their variable heights. Elegant lily-flowered tulips, single lates, green-tinted

viridifloras and fringed tulips flower into May. EXPERIMENT! Be adventurous, try out new varieties five to a pot and

HOW TO STYLE TULIPS with Philippa Craddock



▲ Florist Philippa Craddock created the arrangements for the Duke and Duchess of Sussex's wedding

How to care for cut tulips

► Tulips are surprisingly long-lasting. Keep them away from direct sunlight and heat, and they will last up to two weeks, sometimes a little longer. ► Tulips have a tendency to bend and curve after cutting so, for straighter stems, place the bunch onto brown paper, gently straighten the stems, wrap tightly, and stand the bunch upright in fresh



Tulips will last up to two weeks if kept away from direct sunlight

water for a few hours. As the flowers take up water they will stand much straighter in the vase. Flower food also prolongs their lives. ► Tulips continue to grow once cut, so either cut their stems a little shorter when arranging or embrace the dancing effect as their stems grow longer.

Follow @philippacraddock on Instagram

"Tomato 'Sungold Super Sweet' Your Tastiest Tomato Ever OR...Your Money Back!"



"Totally New and Exclusive for 2021!" Peter McDermott, Head Gardener & Plant Expert.



Sungold Super Sweet really is the sweetest of tomatoes. In fact, with a 'Brix' reading of 11.5% it's sweeter than most strawberries! Its very thin skin and sweet juicy flesh making it perfect for salads and tasty snacks. And so easy to grow whether in the garden, pots or baskets. Simply plant them, water and feed and wait for the fruit. You'll yield up to 10lbs of cherry sized fruits from every plant every season. Plant outdoors for non-stop crops from late June to October – even longer if you transfer them to a greenhouse, conservatory or poly tunnel.

Your Tomato 'Sungold Super Sweet' plants will be delivered nursery fresh for growing on then planting outdoors from May. So, if you like to grow, pick and enjoy your own irresistibly sweet and tasty tomatoes you simply must take advantage of this new and exclusive introductory offer from You Garden – but hurry as stock is genuinely limited! Delivery from Early May.



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These could be the largest strawberries ever and unlike some other 'king giant' types, they are simply bursting with flavor too. Traditional June bearing strawberry to yield more than 10kg. The central berries are sweet and juicy and often weigh more than 40g each. You'll get plenty of them too as well as yields will be very rewarding. Supplied as 6 Jumbo plug plants. min code 50000 ONLY £6.49 SAVE £6.49! HALF PRICE!

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The Telegraph · GARDEN

Delightful Drift roses

Chosen by plant hunter Beth Corbett

Drift roses have been specially bred to be a cross between a full-size ground-cover rose and a miniature rose, so they are spreading in habit, while remaining neat and fairly compact. These beauties are ideal for planting in borders and containers and can even be grown in hanging baskets. Surprisingly easy to grow and requiring little maintenance, they are suitable for any garden to enjoy for years to come.

From spring until the first frosts, your garden will be filled with glossy foliage and clusters of gorgeously fragrant blooms, giving a relaxed and informal look. Not only do they look incredible but they will also act as natural weed suppressors and the flowers are adored by bees.

Fully hardy perennials. Each variety will grow to 60cm in height and a spread of 90cm.



Rosa 'The Fairy'

This graceful, award-winning variety will fill your garden with an abundance of stunning, scented, multi-layered, light pink blooms against dark green foliage throughout the summer months. You will be amazed at just how many flowers are produced. Ideal for growing as a low hedge, it will also happily tolerate shade and poor soils.



Rosa Sea Foam White

This beautiful, reliable variety will complement other plants in the garden perfectly. Drifts of fully double, elegant, pom-pom-like creamy white blooms, each with layer upon layer of petals, almost seem to froth and foam continuously above the dark green glossy foliage all summer long.



Rosa rekord 'Cubana'

Stunning, semi-double, peach-coloured flowers tinted with pink will fill your borders and containers with a tapestry of colour from May all the way through to October. The unique blooms will also provide you with your very own supply of freshly cut roses, perfect for displaying in vases in the home. Excellent disease resistance.

HOW TO BUY

Buy Rosa 'The Fairy' for £12, Rosa rekord 'Cubana' for £14 and Rosa Sea Foam White for £12, or buy the collection of 3 (1 of each) for £24 and save £14. P&P £4.95. Supplied as 9cm pots in 14 days. *Order at gardenshop.telegraph.co.uk/drift or call 0333 772 0325. Contract for supply of goods is with Hayloft Plants Ltd. *Offers subject to availability. Offer closing date 31 May 2021.

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