

Reliable Tulips? Is there really such a thing?

Hybrid tulips dazzle winter-weary gardeners in spring, but many decline (or disappear) after their first year. But there's an easier route: try species tulips.

These bulbs are less showy than the hybrids, but they bloom earlier and they are more apt to come back year after year without special treatment. They'll often increase on their own, too. Just provide them full to part sun and well-drained soil.



Tarda tulip This species blooms in early spring, with each bulb producing three to six flowers, each on a stem four to six inches tall. When the white-tipped yellow petals open completely, they form a star-shaped flower to two-and-a-half inches across. Crocus-like gray-green foliage surrounds the flowers, reaching their same height.

Plant *T. tarda* four to five inches deep, spacing individual bulbs three to six inches apart. This species will naturalize when it's happy, spreading by stolons (underground stems) and seed. USDA Zones 3–8.



Lady tulip Each bulb puts forth one flower, on a stem reaching six to ten inches tall, so the blossom rises higher than this bulb's upright, gray-green leaves. The flowers remain closed on cloudy days and overnight. Because each lady tulip produces just one delicate-looking flower, it is a species best used in quantities. The bulbs should be spaced no more than four or five inches apart. They are apt to gently spread by offsets that occur upon the parent bulb and stolons. This species is a good choice for climates that are too warm in winter for most other tulips. Zones 3–10.



Crocus tulip An early-blooming species, crocus tulip does somewhat resemble its namesake in flower and leaf. The flowers, produced one per bulb, are a shocking hot pink with a golden center. The flowers and foliage all reach between four and six inches tall. Plant the bulbs four inches deep and four inches apart. While other species tulips can cope with part shade, this one prefers only full sun. Zones 3–8.

Turkestan tulip The celestial early- to mid-spring flowers can be two inches across, with a mauve-tinged exterior and yellow center. The blossoms appear alone or in clusters up to a dozen and stand eight to ten inches tall. This species should be planted four inches deep and just three inches apart, so that the bulbs' flowers aggregate into a cloud. Zones 4–8.



Whittall's tulip A denizen of Turkish and Greek meadows, *T. whittalli* is considered a form of *T. orphanidea*. Growing to 12 inches tall with grassy foliage, it's a long-blooming species with red-orange flowers that alight when the sun shines through them. Plant the bulbs five to six inches deep. Similar to wood tulip, it can increase by sending out long stolons, with new plants appearing scattered throughout the space. Zones 4–8.

