

Academy Garden Club Thymes

A NEWSLETTER FOR THE MEMBERS OF THE ACADEMY GARDEN CLUB OF LENOX

APRIL 2025

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Horticultural Column Ready for Tulips

By Harriet Wetstone

It is officially Spring! There is a cluster of vivid purple crocuses at my front door to prove it! Our bulbs do give us such wonderfully intense shows so reliably. Tulips often fall victim to hungry critters and other disasters, so they rarely bloom. Therefore, I have decided to stop growing them.

But every year I am determined to see as many tulips as I can, happy that they grow wonderfully for someone else. It goes without saying that I look forward to Naumkeag's Tulip Festival, this year from April 18th to May 11. Brian Cruvey tells me that he plants fifty thousand tulip bulbs, all by hand, and all pulled out after they bloom because Brian doesn't trust that a bulb's second year bloom will be true to form.

Naumkeag is a beautiful show, but there are others! For example, I have never seen the Wicked Tulips Flower Farm festival! There are now three locations, Exeter and Johnston, Rhode Island and Preston, Connecticut. In 2024 their tulip season opened April 5th in Exeter, April 19th in Preston, and April 27th in Johnston. This year's dates are not yet announced but check out their website: <http://wickedtulips.com> and think about buying tickets ahead.

Wicked Tulips is run by a husband-and-wife team, New Englander Keriann and Jeroen Koeman. Jeroen Koeman is from a Dutch family of tulip growers, and his two brothers are still tulip farmers in Holland. The Koemans' season begins with hand planting a mind boggling one and a half million tulips with a tractor.

Tickets for tulip viewing at the Wicked Tulips farms include your being able to pick a bouquet of ten tulips of your choice. And of course, you can buy tulips and tulip bulbs. While the Koemans purchase only organic bulbs, organic labeling is so complex that the bulbs they sell are not certified organic.

Closer to us, Albany's Tulip Festival in Washington Park is in its 77th year and will be May 10th and 11th this year. Albany has a rich Dutch heritage, hence its great pride in its tulips. The festival also features nearly one hundred artisans with handmade crafts, fine arts, and lots of food. Also think about checking out Ferjulian's Farm in Hudson where you are welcome to cut your own tulips, a dollar a stem. Tickets must be purchased ahead of time on line - estimated dates are April 21 to May 6 (<https://www.ferjulians.com/tulips>).

Tulips are perennial herbaceous bulbiferous neophytes in the *Tulipa* genus, which is a member of the lily family, Liliaceae. According to Wikipedia, there are about 75 different species. They have been cultivated since the 10th century in Persia, were the most prized flowers and the symbol of the Ottomans by the 15th century. They did not come to Europe until the sixteenth century.

Tulips quickly became the most sought-after commodity, a happening referred to as Tulip Mania. One of the reasons for tulip success is the incredible variety in flowering. There is something like 3000 registered varieties of tulips, falling into about 15 groups - and about 26,000 different tulip cultivars!

New cultivars continue to be created, but it's a long process. Breeders crosspollinate varieties that have the characteristics they have in mind, e.g., a fringed black tulip.

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But actually producing a cultivar that is marketable in terms of color, form, robustness, health, etc. takes fifteen years or more. A newly developed seed does not even begin to produce flowers for at least seven years, seven years when the breeder doesn't even know what the flower will look like; color and shape are notoriously difficult to predict. And once you have a bulb that will reliably produce a flower that is deemed to be marketable it takes years after that to get a bulb to a point of commercial viability.

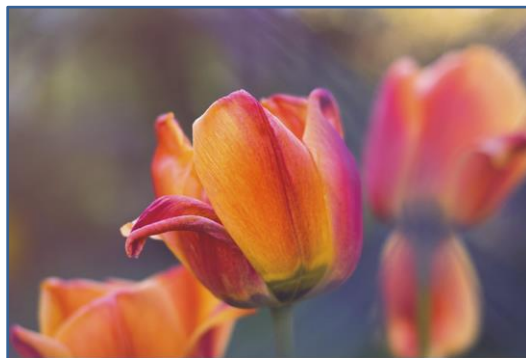
So, the different groups of tulips? Wow, here goes:

greigii, fostering, Darwinhybride, triumph, viridflora, kaufmanniana, rembrandt, fringed, parrot, lily-flowered, single early, single late, double early, double late, and botanical.

Let's look at just three.



Double Early - an abundance of petals up to four inches in diameter, over 200 cultivars available - the pink beauty is called **Foxtrot**.



Triumph - these tulips are cup shaped with strong stems - a wide variety of colors and heights ranging from 15 to 20 inches - the bulbs only last a few years, but they are worth it. This one is called **Cairo**.



Parrot - tulips like birds, with petals that are ruffled, feathered, curled, twisted, puckered and fringed - they grow from 14 to 22 inches high - they bloom late in the season - and they need extra protection. But **boy** are they gorgeous! This one is called **Super Parrot**.

See you in the tulip fields!