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## The Beauty of Bulbs

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Beautiful gardens don't just happen. It takes time — time doing the not-so-fun things such as pulling weeds and tilling soil. The rewards, however, are immeasurable.

Monroe family Waco, Cristy and Jonathan Bankston are now reaping the benefits of the work they've put in earlier this spring. The Bankstons have oriental and Asiatic Lilies, roses and gladiolus just to name a few.

Cristy Bankston said she loves the aroma that blossoms from the lilies and the aesthetic pleasure she gets from gladiolus. If you've missed your chance to plant spring bulbs, don't fret. You can still enjoy some of the flowers the Bankstons have in their yard, if you act soon.

Here are a few summer flowering bulbous plants: amaryllis, crinum, caladiums, daylily, dahlia, gladiolus, lily and spider lily, according to Kristy Farr, member of the Northeastern Louisiana Master Gardener Association.

But be careful that soil temperatures are just right. Soil should be moist but not too wet — wet soil can rot bulbs.

An example of bulbs prone to rotting are caladiums. These should be planted after the soil has warmed significantly, said Cristy Bankston. Caladiums are designed for summer heat.

Bankston said caladiums should be planted after Easter or in late April depending on the weather. However, she took a risk and planted some two weeks ahead of schedule.

"We've done the same thing with several bedding annuals," she said. "But again, if we were to have an additional frost, it could damage or even kill some tender varieties of annuals."

A good rule of thumb is to hold off until all chance of frost has diminished, she said. Caladiums have to be dug up and stored or purchased each year. Most people plant caladiums on Good Friday, but the cold weather has set some people back, Farr said.

"If you plant them now they'll be blooming in two to four weeks," Farr said. Bulbs, she said, are among the easiest flowers to grow successfully.

Jim Turner, nursery consultant with The Home Depot in Monroe, suggested planting the following before the end of April: Asian Lilies, Elephant Ear and Persian Palm.

Asian lilies and caladiums need to go in the ground within the next week or so to get a late bloom. It's also a good time to start looking at fall, Turner said. Lycoris, also known as the surprise lily can go in the ground now. Some will bloom in mid-summer, others will start in September and go through late October.

"Some lilies will bloom in cool weather," he said. "The Asian lilies will bloom late into spring."

Turner likes to use a blood meal or bone meal fertilizer and coat the plants in fertilizer similar to the way chicken is breaded.

Bulbs can come up and die back and then the flower shoots up in late summer, said Jim Brooks, president of the Northeastern Louisiana Master Gardener Association.

To ensure the perennials and ornamentals are off to a good start, Bankston's husband Waco, fertilizes with two types of fertilizer to jump-start the plants growth. For worms, he uses a product called "Alaska Fish Emulsion."

"This is organic and helps me to attract worms," he said. "It's a gardener's best friend."

He also uses Miracle Grow and alternates the two fertilizers bi-weekly. Waco Bankston plans to continue rotating fertilizer through the next few weeks, and then he'll begin tapering back until the fall.

Now's also a good time to move plants around because they are beginning to green up and can be readily moved and identified, he said.

"Remember to read the tags for size and shape on perennials," he said. "When planting perennials be very mindful of what the plant will look like when it reaches adult size. Space them appropriately according to the associated tag. In the spring, your ornamental tags may look sparse, but give it a month, and you'll be happy you didn't overcrowd them — and so will the plants."

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