Choices, choices

Overwhelmed by the mass of tulip bulbs on offer? Friends and contributors of COUNTRY LIFE tell us which tulips they will be planting for next spring



Alan Titchmarsh

I love what I call the 'stained tulips'—those with contrasting venations and stripes that smack of the old Dutch flower paintings. I plant up 10in terracotta pots with 10 bulbs of each: varieties such as 'Gavota' (plum purple and yellow), 'Rem's Favourite' (purple and white) and 'Princess Irene' (dusky pink and salmon). My wife adores red tulips, so in the rectangular beds on either side of the house we planted two different varieties: 'Ile de France' and 'Kingsblood'. At the risk of being unpatriotic, I have to say that 'Ile de France' (a really deep, rich red) was far better and much longer lasting than 'Kingsblood'. I'd recommend it heartily.

'Chatsworth: the gardens and the people who made them' by Alan Titchmarsh is out now

> '*Tulipa batalinii* 'Bronze Charm' is just the scented thing for fashionable gravel gardens'

Charlotte Harris

When it comes to tulips (as with many things), I'm drawn to the extremes. At one end are the species tulips that speak to where they're from such as *Tulipa acuminata*, an elegantly wiry Turkish heirloom tulip with unusual twisted petals, or *Tulipa sprengeri*, native to Turkey's rocky, scrub-covered slopes; scarlet, delicate, happy in dappled shade, with gorgeous senesced seed heads (as seen in our Chelsea September 2021 garden).

At the other far end is the bold flamboyance of two-tone Rembrandt tulips, named after the painter. These look best combined with solid, single-colour tulips for high contrast. My personal favourite: 'Rem's Favourite,' purple flames streaking across ivory petals.

Harris Bugg Studio will begin work next year on designing the Centenary Garden at Newhailes House and Gardens in Musselburgh for the National Trust for Scotland

Arne Maynard

Although I love all kinds of tulip—especially historic tulips with their flamed and feathered markings—my absolute favourites are the species. These perennial bulbs naturalise well in meadows, lawn edges or beneath trees and, provided the ground is well drained, don't require lifting over winter. I've been experimenting with *Tulipa clusiana* varieties and am fascinated by the difference in their habits. *T. clusiana* opens and closes without a change in petal structure, whereas *T. clusiana* 'Lady Jane' opens, then gradually curls its petals back reminiscent of Elizabethan hair curls, completely spiralling before fading. I am introducing them into the borders at home at Allt y bela in Monmouthshire, Wales, to give contrast to the larger flowering Rembrandts, adding a delicacy to be discovered close-up.

Other lovely varieties to try are *T. clusiana* 'Honky Tonk', *T. cretica* 'Hilde' and *T. clusiana* 'Peppermintstick', which complement each other beautifully.

Garden designer Arne Maynard has several projects in progress in America, together with his British and European work



Miniature *Tulipa clusiana* 'Lady Jane' is a favourite of the garden designer Arne Maynard. As with other species tulips, it is perfect for naturalising in meadows, beneath trees and on the edge of a lawn. Unusually, its petals curl back after opening

Isabel Bannerman

Squirrels have made it impossible to plant tulips except in highly fortified pots and my conscience has stopped me growing mass-produced bulbs. That means it's only delicate, long-lived, species tulips grown in grass or gravel for me now. Pheasants ate my *Tulipa sylvestris*, but both they—and the squirrels—seem to abhor *T. humilis* 'Persian Pearl' and 'Odalisque'. They were both here already, so they must be tough. *T. clusiana* 'Lady Jane' and 'Cynthia' are miniature pink-and-white striped sweeties. *T. batalinii* 'Bronze Charm', is the colour of evening primroses with buff reveals. Formerly sold for rock gardens, it is just the scented thing for fashionable gravel gardens. The clue to longevity is to plant deep, even in sustainably sourced crushed concrete.

Garden designer Isabel Bannerman is making a wildflower meadow with species tulip bulbs at her home in Somerset →

Facing page: ***Tulipa* 'Rem's Favourite', selected by Charlotte Harris and Angel Collins, will flower for several years in the ground or in pots. For best effect, plant it with single-coloured tulips**





Left: **Deep purple 'Havran', 'Helmar' with a yellow stripe—selected by designer Tom Stuart-Smith—and the rich red 'Jan Reus'.**
Right: **The little species *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittallii Group from Western Turkey is planted in vast swathes by Jo Thompson**

Fergus Garrett

This year, we are trying perhaps 30 new varieties and will test these out in pots to see how we like them, looking for distinctive flowers held above the foliage, a long season and an elegant habit. In the garden, elegant species *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittallii, with pointed petals of burnished orange with flashes of yellow and a hypnotic smoky centre, will sit in the cracks on Christo's terrace—and we're hoping that it will self-sow and naturalise. *T. sylvestris*, with long, elegant, fluted flowers of rich yellow on awry stems, will be planted in the grass under the mulberry tree. *T.* 'Apricot Impression', with bold, large, apricot and pink flowers, will float among self-sown blue forget-me-nots, mauve sweet rocket (*Hesperis matronalis*) and acid lime-green *Smyrnium perfoliatum*. Finally, jazzy *T.* 'Banja Luka', yellow with dramatic flames of fiery red, will run through a sea of blue forget-me-nots.

Fergus Garrett is head gardener at Great Dixter, East Sussex (former home of the late Country Life *columnist Christopher Lloyd), and CEO of the Great Dixter Charitable Trust*

Jo Thompson

I'll be going for masses of *Tulipa orphanidea* (Whittallii Group) 'Major' among pale narcissi to follow the oxlips. This tulip is invariably described in terms of its main colour—copper orange—but it's the deep golden-flushed blood-red-to-black base that makes the impact. Appearing a deeper red in the shadows, this rare, yet easy little tulip becomes more coppery depending on the amount of light upon it. The lightest scattering of red and yellow against green is all it takes to create an atmosphere that is simultaneously gentle and uplifting. The calmness of a backdrop of green grass is perfect, so dry patches of grass under the yet-to-emerge canopies of orchard trees is where I'll be putting these little jewels.

Jo Thompson is currently designing gardens in the Cotswolds, Sussex and the south of France. Her next book, 'Small Garden Design', will be published in March 2027

Tom Stuart-Smith

I use tulips in three different ways in the garden here. Firstly, we plant a mêlee of brightly coloured tulips to give a real intensity of oranges, purples, rusts and cerise. (No yellows other than as a stripe in 'Helmar', an all time favourite.) We use them to edge the vegetable beds and in the courtyard, which is full of brick and tiles and corten steel, so the colours here are very powerful. I always order 'Havran', 'Dolls Minuet', 'Ballerina', 'Princess Irene' and 'Paul Scherer'. We use lots of *Tulipa saxatilis* in the prairie, mixed up with cowslips and anemone blanda—the yellow at the base of the petals is rather wonderful with the cowslips.

Last of all, we use some more polite tulips in loose drifts through planting in the garden. Things such as 'Maureen', 'Attila', 'Merlot' and 'Spring Green'—single-coloured and/or a bit quieter, in among herbaceous plants. These never get lifted, whereas many of the others do. We replant a lot of tulips, but they do fade of course… I'm thinking of veering towards using more long-lived tulips only. The things they do to tulips to store are pretty terrible and the organic ones are very expensive, so a wake up is on its way, I feel.

Tom Stuart-Smith's design for the Clore Garden at Tate Britain opens next year

Angel Collins

I prefer to plant tulips in either pots or long grass. In many gardens, I've created what I call a 'parterre meadow' and tulips are the perfect bulb to complement this design. Their glorious heads bobbing above the fresh green grass of spring create a wonderful sight.

When choosing tulips, I consider several factors: height, colour, bulb size (preferably 5in), and the bonus of flowering for a second or third year. 'Rem's Favourite' is now with me for its fourth year, together with the lovely pink tulip 'Discovery'. The viridifloras are also excellent at longevity (including 'Spring Green', 'Artist' and 'Virichic'), as are, of course, the reliable Darwins.

However, my favourite tulip of all time—no, not the beautiful 'Belle Époque'—is actually 'Mystic van Eijk.' It has huge flowers of soft apricot pink and it seems to get taller and its flowers grow bigger as every day passes.

Garden designer Angel Collins is working on a number of projects, including Bruern Abbey, Oxfordshire →

Jonathan Buckley; Marianne Majerus Garden Images; Andrew Montgomery/*The Tulip Garden* by Polly Nicholson (Phaidon, £29.95)





Left: **Huge apricot-pink flowers on tall stems make ‘Mystic van Eijk’ stand out for Angel Collins. In planters, it looks beautiful on its own.** *Right:* **The designer also admires Viridiflora tulips such as ‘Artist’ (‘Spring Green’, ‘Virichic’ and ‘Doll’s Minuet’ are popular, too)**





Left: **The lily-flowered ‘West Point’, which is the choice of Rupert Golby, flowers for weeks and looks lovely growing through a carpet of forget-me-nots or in a verdigris planter.** *Right:* **Sturdy stems support the large goblet-shaped flowers of this tall Darwin tulip ‘Apricot Pride’, which will stand well in a border, suggests the Country Life contributor Charles Quest-Ritson**

Where to buy tulip bulbs

Bloms Bulbs (01234 709099; www.blomsbulbs.com)
J Parker's (0161–848 1100; www.dutchbulbs.co.uk)
De Jager (01622 840299; www.dejager.co.uk)
Jacques Amand International (020–8420 7110; www.jacquesamandintl.com)
Sarah Raven (0345 092 0283; www.sarahraven.com)
Avon Bulbs (07425 833906; www.avonbulbs.co.uk)
Peter Nyssen (0161–747 4000; www.peternyssen.com)
Scamp's Bulbs (07826 067175; www.scampsbulbs.co.uk)



***Tulipa* 'Absalon', a true Rembrandt tulip (Division 9) dates from 1780, is robust and produces good offsets, finds Polly Nicholson**

Tilly Ware

A freshly gravelled perimeter bed in the kitchen garden is my new playground for all things Mediterranean. I'll be planting *Tulipa orphanidea* Whittalli Group in the impeccably drained soil, aiming for vigorous colonies that spread. The form is beautiful: neat, sharp buds with pointed petals that glow with the dusky smokiness of a fire's ember, the burnt caramel and rich orange irresistible against silver foliage. At 1ft high, they will bob up among artemisia and euphorbia in late April; by summer, *Eschscholzia* 'Milkmaid' and *Nigella papillosa* 'African Bride' cover the gaps. Until now, my species tulips lived year on year in terracotta pots as treasures; now, it is time to set them free.
Tilly Ware is a garden writer and Country Life *contributor*

Charles Quest-Ritson

I always plant some Greigii forms to brighten the garden in early spring, with red-and-yellow 'Stresa' being a particular favourite. Likewise, 'Carnaval de Nice', double-flowered with red-and-white stripes and variegated leaves—the last of all to flower. Both look best in pots near the main door of the house. This year's RHS trial had some promising novelties to try, too: 'Apricot Pride' will make a fine border plant, exceptionally large in height and flower, but I also fancy the spectacularly vulgar 'New Santa'—bright-red petals rimmed with a hoar-frost edging of white—and the ruffled parrot-tulip 'Flaming Memory', rather rudely described as rhubarb and custard in colour. Yum yum!
Charles Quest-Ritson wrote the 'RHS Encyclopedia of Roses'

Mary Keen

I was once a tulipaholic, ordering them in thousands to be composted at the end of spring. This is far from sustainable, so I have changed my ways. I always want 'Ballerina' for its scent and its graceful habit, so those go in pots and, when the leaves have withered, the bulbs are saved. In the beds, multi-headed 'Antoinette' and 'Queen of Night' are so far perennial, but the best bet for lasting tulips are the species ones planted in grass. My favourite is 'Honky Tonk'. The name is ghastly, but the flower is pale yellow, scented and lovely with cowslips.
'Diary of a Keen Gardener' by Mary Keen is out now

Rupert Golby

Lily-flowered tulips have a very appealing elegance in stature and form that extends their value far beyond their flowering period—for some weeks before flowering, their elongated necks have a swan-like quality. The flower buds are presented as refined spears, developing into pinched and waisted Champagne flutes that fill and evolve into flamboyant explosions of petals, all over two to three weeks. 'West Point' has clear acid-yellow colouring initially of a green hue, ripening to a sharp and powerful citrus yellow. Flowering in late April, it can be strikingly partnered with a carpet of forget-me-nots. Planted in large verdigris copper containers, the contrasting colour combination offers a strong sense of spring. Where 'West Point' cannot be found, 'Flashback' offers a worthy alternative.
Rupert Goldby designs and consults upon gardens across the country. His work at Ferne Park in Dorset was featured in Country Life *(May 13)*

Polly Nicholson

I will be ordering a handful of *Tulipa* 'Absalon' to supplement the National Collection of *Tulipa* (historical) that I hold with Plant Heritage. 'Absalon' is a true Rembrandt (Division 9) tulip dating from 1780, with flames and feathers of the richest mahogany red over a base of primrose yellow. With a real aura of antiquity, it stands apart from modern cultivars, but is surprisingly robust and produces good-sized offsets. It should be lifted once the foliage has died back in July and stored carefully before being planted back in a pot again in the depths of winter. The investment and effort are well worth it.
Polly Nicholson is curating an exhibition on tulips at the Garden Museum, London SE1, opening March 2027