

## How to PLANT A BULB

Brook no distractions when unpacking your bulbs. Some activities warrant a degree of ceremony, and being bookended by a breath. To which end...

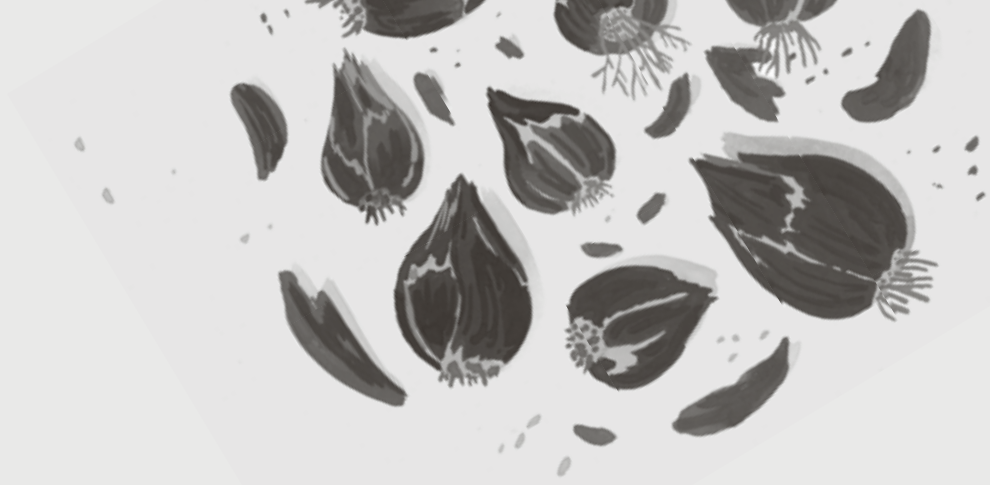
*Breathe in, hold for a moment then, slowly and with some noise, breathe out.*

Open the bag; by rights it should be labelled “Hope & Promise”, but something like “Tulips” or “Lilies” is perhaps more likely and, really, it’s all the same. Pour the contents out into a small pile; taking up an individual between thumb and forefinger, apply firm but gentle pressure. Within a dry and crinkled paper coat there should be taut, plump resistance; discard the squashy, the damp, or – heaven forbid – the mouldy.

Run your thumb over the rough, whiskery basal plate from where the roots will emerge, and continue turning until you get to the point that marks “this way up”; a gentle peak now covered by paper-thin skin and the fleshy, nascent leaves through which the emerging stem will shortly push its way. A plant instinctively knows where to find the sky but burns energy in righting itself at the expense of flowers.

*Breathe in, hold for a moment, then slowly out.*

You are ready to plant. Come spring, flowers will announce that the soil has forgiven you for repeatedly puncturing its surface, but the invasion should be acknowledged, and permission sought, before clumsily inserting your chosen few into a complex and functioning society. Select your hole-making instrument based upon bulb size and ground conditions. An ordinary trowel will do for tulips in a sandy soil, but for clay you’ll be better served by a bulb planter that will leave a neat hole with every plunge. A thin trowel



with a point or a dandelion weeder will be ideal for smaller bulbs – muscari, or crocus, say. Whoever invented the long-handled planter with treads forgot you must still bend down to place the bulb into the hole.

Find a board on which to kneel – the ground will be soft, and the direct application of a gardener’s knee will leave a longer-lasting impression than strictly desired.

*A breath.* This next bit requires a little visualization. *As before, in, hold...*

Picture the scene with the bulbs you’re about to plant in bloom... *breathe out with the noise of the wind in long grass...*

...and scatter the bulbs where you see flowers. Avoid the much-trumped technique of throwing the bulbs into the air and planting them where they land; bulbs are sociable individuals and invariably roll into tight groups.

Make a hole to a depth two to three times greater than the height of your bulb, and drop your bulb neatly in, pointy-end up, before covering over with the soil previously excavated, and firming it gently back down into place. Repeat, until every bulb is tucked away. In a month or two, your eyes will thank you for the effort you have spent today.

*Stand up, step back, and stretch well. Your body will thank you for this tomorrow.*