

How to Mark, Dig, Bag, and Tag

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Digging bulbs doesn't have a great deal of science to it except for the obvious, yet not-so-easy task of knowing where they are. Absurd? Perhaps - but if the bulbs weren't marked while in bloom, there is little you can do about it after the fact except dig behind the marker and hope for the best.

Presuming the bulbs you wish to dig are marked in some way, the easiest method is to dig straight down on three sides of the hole and gently pry the bulbs up. Mark them straight away before you go

to the next variety and put them in an open weave plastic bin.

Spread out the bulb bin on a hard surface and vigorously spray the bulbs with water directly from a garden hose until all the dirt has been removed. Don't worry that the force of the spray takes off a layer or two of the bulb tunic - that's normal. Next place the bulbs in labeled mesh bags and immediately hang the bulbs in a shaded place to dry. The space for drying needs to have an air exchange system; some use a fan to circulate the air, while others may chose

to allow nature to do its thing. Hanging bags of bulbs on bamboo poles under a shade tree is also effective. A little rain doesn't hurt the drying process, however, if it is an unusually wet year, drying has to be moved to a covered position.

The normally recommended drying place is under the overhang of a building or shed. Make sure that the sun does not have direct access to the bulbs during the drying process. Removing daffodil foliage from the beds helps control diseases.

Bulbs will need two weeks to dry and go dormant, longer is not necessary. After drying, clean one more time by removing excess scales, dirt and roots. Remove the roots with a gentle twisting motion, being careful not to remove the entire basal region. The roots will come off in a full clump with a small thin outer layer of the basal region; this is normal. During the removal of the roots, gently pick off any loose scales and polish bulbs with a soft cloth to eliminate the remainder of the dirt and papery tunic.

Double check your labels and make sure they are readable - and will remain readable - until planting.

Inspect each bulb as you clean it. Check the basal area for sign of the bulb fly larva, if there are damaged bulbs (hole in

the base plate), or if the bulb is soft or dark colored and feels wet, dispose of the bulb.

Store the bulbs in a cool, dry place until time for club sales, exchanges and normal fall (re)planting. It is important during the storage period not to restrict bulbs from air circulation.

Keeping the bulbs free of dirt and dry is important for preserving the bulbs until planting. It is recommended that a cleaning of the bulbs occur once every three to four weeks. Handle each bulb, looking for signs of infection, or rot, or missed bulb fly holes in the basal plate. Dispose of infected bulbs so that the entire selection will not become infected.

After the bulbs are dry and cleaned, it is important to select the bulbs to keep and the ones that are excess to need. If, like me, planting is for showing, mature rounds produce the best show-quality flowers. Sort out the rounds (single nose) as the first choice for replanting, and send the double-nose and the triple-nose bulbs to the sales or exchanges. Add the slabs (chips) into the sacks, too. Planting back mature rounds also means I can keep the bulbs down longer before having to dig as the multiplication of the bulbs from a single bulb will not be as fast as from double or triple-nose bulbs. In other words I don't have to dig and thin as often.