

Meetings and Announcements

Next Horticultural Tour

It has been almost 20 years since I offered our first horticulture study tour. That was in 2005, and these tours have certainly been enriching and beneficial for me and for my work.

Per my announcement last month, in cooperation with Travel Gallery of Pasadena, I do plan to offer our next horticultural tour to northern Spain and northern Portugal. I had thought to offer this itinerary for September, 2024. However, in discussion with Frank Fish of Travel Gallery, we have come to the conclusion that we are not satisfied with the itinerary as it stands. In a few months, Frank will be accompanying a group from San Marino to this area of Spain, and he will have an opportunity to have on-site experience in several of the cities, as well as meeting in-person Spanish operators with whom he cooperates. Therefore, we have decided to not offer a hort tour this fall, but plan to move the program to the last week of April and first week of May, 2025.

I hope this change is not confounding for any of us potential participants. However, in my past experience, it is better to have the itinerary tuned the way we want rather than move sooner than we should.

I will also like to mention that I intend to offer a horticultural tour to Japan in spring, 2026. Japan has superb examples of garden design, and one of the world's premier rose gardens is there, which I visited in 2009 as part of an international rose symposium.

Master Gardener Program

No new update. Same information below as last month.

UC Cooperative Extension in Kern County has received funding for a Master Gardener (MG) coordinator. The funding cycle began Oct. 1, and the wheels are turning to hire a coordinator. The timeline suggests we would begin the MG program next fall. The MG program offers classroom instruction in horticulture with a required volunteer-hour component. We have not had an MG program in Kern Co. since ca. 1993, when we moved to an educational outreach in horticulture without the volunteer component. I don't have plans for a horticulture class this spring and likely not until the MG program begins.

Transition to Battery-Powered Lawn Equipment

The implementation date for the changeover from gasoline-powered to battery-powered mowers and lawn equipment was supposed to be January 1. I have not noticed any change locally, nor is it clear to me how this switch will be enforced. I have obtained a technical

document from the Air Resources Board, and expect to offer Greenscene readers some idea of the data upon which this change is predicated.

Fall Planted Bulbs—Planting Time in a Few Months

I noticed a story on BBC news about the spring floral display at Keukenhof Garden in the Netherlands. Many photos of Keukenhof are available on the Internet or on the Keukenhof website. Since the bloom is now, or about now, we can see possibilities for our gardens. Keukenhof is open only eight weeks per year in spring, but it is the world's premier bulb garden. It might be worth a plane ticket just to see that, about halfway between Leiden and Amsterdam, with convenient bus connections. We've been there twice during our horticultural tours, photos below, taken on a perfect—cool and misty—day in April, 2012.





Flowers such as these are planted as bulbs in fall before winter, so cold temperatures satisfy their internal chilling requirement, leading to flowering. Although some northern favorites don't do well in the Bakersfield area, others do, and a number of bulbs or bulb-like plants from parts of the world, such as southern Africa, do quite well in our similar Mediterranean climate. We may also find the native *Brodiaea* providing a display of spring flowers in rangeland settings.

Bulbs are easy to add to a garden or shrub bed. (I'm going to use the term "bulb" instead of more specific botanical definitions for bulb-like structures, e.g., corms, tubers, rhizomes.) Planting depth should be about twice the height of the bulb. Some fertilizer containing phosphorus and a little nitrogen can be mixed with soil when planting, but nutrient levels in most home landscapes are sufficient for flowering in spring. Bulbs can be planted individually, or a bed can be excavated, the bulbs set in place, and covered all at once. A sunny location is generally best for foliage growth after flowering. In a favorable location bulbs are perennials, although their flower production may diminish with time. It is also possible to plant bulbs in containers and move them around as accent pieces. Bulbs can also be "forced," which means satisfying their chilling requirement and then placing indoors in a suitable container for a one-time show.

Tulips are perhaps the most recognizable flower from fall-planted bulbs, but tulips have a higher chilling requirement than many others. While tulips are not at their best in the Bakersfield area, locations in the mountains or desert with additional chilling hours are more favorable for this flower. In contrast, *Narcissus* species, also called daffodils, do quite well on the San Joaquin valley floor. These have trumpet-shaped flowers, often in shades of yellow. Dozens of varieties exist, including bicolors and some with shorter or longer trumpets. 'King Alfred' is an old variety with especially large flowers. Of the bulbs popular in the North, *Crocus*, although not at its best here, will give a nice spring display. Purple is the traditional color, but pinks and variegated flowers are available. *Muscari*, or grape hyacinth, is another northern plant that is easy to grow and successful here.

A number of bulbs from Mediterranean regions are less well known but are adapted to the Bakersfield area due to similarities in climate. *Freesia* has a waxy, fragrant, tubular flower, originally white, but breeders have introduced yellow, golden orange, pink, red and lavender-blue. *Ixia* is also known as African corn lily, with flowers of red, orange, yellow, or a couple of other colors on long slender stalks. The flowers last about a week when cut, making them a crisp accent to a bouquet. Blue *Scilla campanulata* (renamed *Endymion hispanicus*) from Spain resembles the English bluebell. There are many others, such as anemones, *Sparaxis*, *Tritonia*, and *Watsonia*. The most popular Mediterranean bulb in our area is probably *Ranunculus* with its multicolored papery flowers, fall-planted in Bakersfield, but spring-planted in cold winter areas.

A note of caution though: Bulbs may rot if planted where heavily irrigated in summer. You may need to dig them up after foliage has dried and store if used in a wet area. Many gardeners omit this step and simply let the bulbs fend for themselves, replanting as necessary.

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