

Southern Living®

MARCH 2025

A Colorful Home

NEW WAYS TO DECORATE WITH GREENS AND BLUES

St. Simons
Island,
Georgia

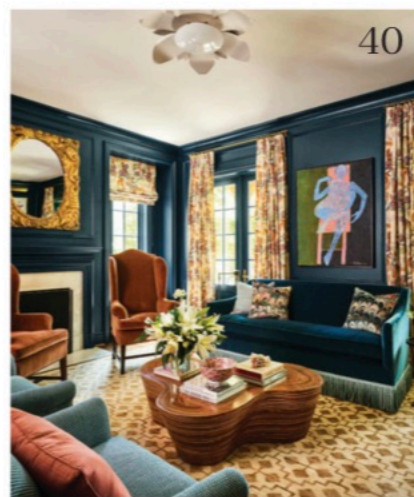
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CITY

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WHAT WE'RE LOVING,
SHARING, AND CELEBRATING

In Season

GARDEN TOUR

Brights of Spring

Nashville's Cheekwood
in Bloom festival
welcomes new growth
in Technicolor style



**SEASONAL
SPECTACULAR**
See Cheekwood
in Bloom from
March 8 through
April 13.

M

MUSIC CITY is known for its storied venues and constant rotation of live performances. But come early March, you'll find that the real show is happening on the outskirts of town, where there is nary a rhinestone or guitar in sight. At historic Cheekwood Estate & Gardens, thousands of bulbs—including tulips, daffodils, and hyacinths—erupt into dazzling color each spring, drenching the grounds in a rainbow of happy hues and beckoning flower lovers to marvel at the annual Cheekwood in Bloom festival. "They're the reliable harbingers of the season," says Peter Grimaldi, the property's vice president of gardens and facilities and the man behind the blossoming magic. "When plants start flowering and waking up in everyone else's yard, they're waking up here too."

Of course, the sheer volume of bulbs emerging from their long winter's naps at this 55-acre 1929 estate would be next to impossible to replicate at home. The Bradford Robertson Color Garden—the centerpiece of the seasonal display—holds the

majority of the tulips here, but add in the rest of the property, plus the daffodils and hyacinths popping up in other beds, and you're looking at a living collection of over 250,000 spring-flowering bulbs. "Things go from being pretty to artful and impressive when you push them over the top, and we do a lot of that," says Grimaldi. "Are you bold enough? Do you have the courage to organize 100,000 tulips? We say yes."

This act of botanical valor is kicked off the summer before, when he and his team begin mapping out the following year's spring display, often finding a muse in the on-site art museum. He likens it to a paint-by-number project. "You've got the canvas; that's the garden. And you've got a color palette loaded with paints; those are your tulips. We lay them down on the ground in pleasing sweeps and shapes and lines until we think it looks good," he says.

The bulbs arrive by the truckload in October and are stored in a refrigerated container until it's go time. "Around November 1, the tulips start going in the ground," explains Grimaldi. "This is done by an in-house team of about 12 gardeners (plus some

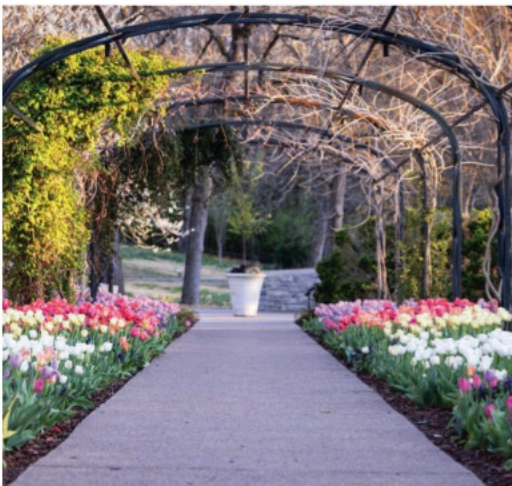
volunteers), and our goal is to be finished before the holidays.”

Around the same time, they’re putting other seasonal flowers into the beds, interplanting the hyacinths among the tulips and adding the violas to the cultivated soil above the bulbs. These typically bloom before the tulips, providing some cheery color in the winter months.

Unlike tulips (which are all treated as annuals, given the Southern climate), the daffodils are perennials, reappearing every year. They’re also Grimaldi’s favorite. “It’s hard to beat the permanent daffodil collection. Some of them have been in the ground at Cheekwood for decades,” he says. His mission is to continue increasing the volume of these sunny flowers,

layering in more bulbs wherever the gardens can use a much-needed dose of early-spring color.

“There’s this nice interplay between the seasonal displays and the permanent ones, with the daffodils wrapping around and supporting this pile of tulips in the Bradford Robertson Color Garden that’s just popping off like crazy,” he says. For those making the pilgrimage to Cheekwood, it’s enough to take their breath away. But Grimaldi hopes the resplendent scene prompts a more lasting connection—one that inspires people to cultivate something similar at home, albeit on a much smaller scale. “Whatever you need to make you happy,” he says, before adding with a laugh, “or to get the HOA off your back.”



STARS OF THE SHOW
The Bradford Robertson Color Garden holds an abundance of tulips.



The Art of Planting Bulbs

Grimaldi's expert insights for brilliant blooms

FOR TULIPS

Treat Them Like Annuals

While these flowers are technically perennials, they don't typically fare as well in the Southern climate, so you should be prepared to plant new bulbs each year—

and be sure to order those that come prechilled. "They won't reliably get the chilling requirement that they need [to thrive] here over winter," Grimaldi says. So it's essential to work with bulbs that have already spent extended time in coolers.

Set and Forget Them...

"You want to get them in the ground between Halloween and Christmas," says Grimaldi about the bulbs. Then from there, add 2 to 3 inches of mulch before leaving them to their own devices. "There's something going on in the

bulbs, [making] all of the sugars and building blocks for proteins that they need to turn into flowers. We don't irrigate our seasonal display beds once between Halloween and Mother's Day," he notes.

...Or Start Them Indoors

If you don't wish to fend off hungry wildlife before the tulips even bloom, Grimaldi advises planting bulbs in nursery pots and storing them in an unheated garage. "Once they start poking up, roll them out in your spring containers. That way, the squirrels and deer won't eat them over the winter," he says. After they've flowered, apply deer repellent to curb any nibbling.

FOR DAFFODILS

Snap Some Photos

Prep for the following spring by taking plenty of pictures when they're blossoming this year. "Inevitably, next fall, when you begin to add more daffodils, transplant a shrub, or install some perennials, you're going to want to know where those flowers are so you don't plant in the middle of them and disturb them," says Grimaldi.

Give Them Time

Don't cut back your daffodils prematurely. "Even after they've bloomed, the plants are not done collecting all the energy they need to flower the next year. Wait until they are fully gold and brown and melted on the ground before removing the stems and foliage with sharp garden shears," he explains.

Boost Your Flower IQ

Familiarize yourself with these Cheekwood favorites



1. 'Dreamer' tulip 2. 'Valdivia' tulip 3. 'Orange Balloon' tulip 4. 'Escape' tulip 5. 'World Friendship' tulip
6. 'Geranium' narcissus 7. 'Continental' tulip 8. Eastern redbud 9. 'Negrita' tulip