

# Fall is for Fritillarias!

Cool mornings puts Dan in a bulby mood

I've been walking a lot lately. There is something about the cool mornings that makes me wake up earlier than usual. Fully equipped with my sweatshirt and iPod, I've been exploring the plants of my neighborhood.

The leaves are starting to drop, and I can't resist the smell of them so sweet in the crisp mornings, or the crunch under my feet. Here and there the fall blooming cyclamen are starting to wake up from their summer dormancy. They make me laugh the way the petals of their flowers flare back like they have been blow-drying their hair too much.

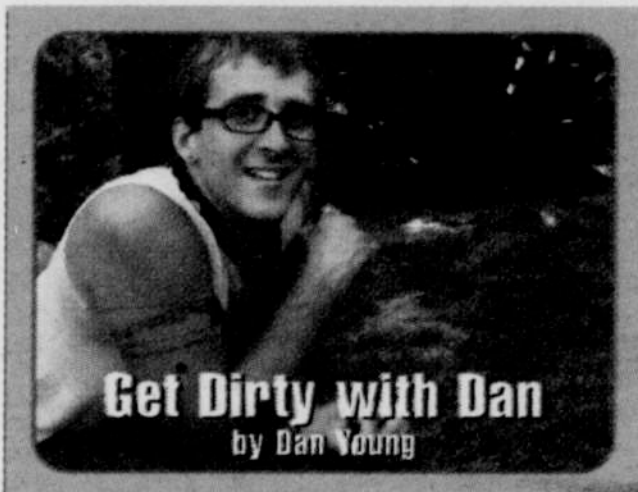
My neighborhood also seems to have its fair share of the oddly out-of-place fall crocus. This is one plant that, no matter how hard I try to accept it, always seems out of place with its soft pink flowers. The kind of pink that looks so normal in March seems so foreign against the brown lawns of late September. Seeing these few bulbs and corms blooming at this time of year made this question from Chris of Northeast Portland seem appropriate. He writes:

My boyfriend really likes bulbs that bloom in the spring, and I'd like to buy him some. The problem is that he is the gardener in the relationship and I have what some might call two black thumbs.

I think this is the time to plant some of these, because we were at a nursery recently and there were some on the shelf. He already has lots of daffodils and tulips. (I think.) Are there any others that you might suggest for me as a gift for him?

Chris, you know you are totally right that October is the time to plant bulbs for next spring. Sounds like your boyfriend's green thumbs are rubbing off on you at least a little.

When it comes to spring bulbs, my favorites are definitely the subtle and somewhat understated Fritillarias. Chances are pretty good that you will find a number of different species at any given nursery. In my opinion they are all nice.



I have large clumps of *Fritillaria michailovskyi* planted in my yard. The soft green leaves and the nodding purple bell-shaped flowers with a yellow lip pair really well with gray-leaved plants like *Senecio greyii*. This species is native to rocky slopes in Turkey, so a shovel full of pumice is a really good idea to work into the soil when planting to improve drainage.

*Fritillaria meleagris* is also super cool. Its flower gives it the common name Checker Lily, and when you see one bloom you will know

why. It has the most perfect and bizarre checkerboard pattern of maroon and pink on its flowers. Plant this one near the edge of a bed because it is short—only about 8 inches. You will also certainly want to get a good close look at it. Often this species is sold as a mix of the checkered type and a white blooming form of the species. I never sweat the white flowering ones, though; they look great side by side.

One more really nice one is *Fritillaria persica*.

It's much taller than the last two, at about 2 1/2 feet. The gray whorled leaves of this one are almost as beautiful as the flower. The spike of flowers holds about 20 plum-colored inch-long bells with a dusty haze on them. This is one that people always stop to ask me about in my yard.

Remember, Chris, love the Fritillaria, and hopefully your boyfriend will, too. ☐

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*"On sunless days in winter,  
we shall know  
By whom the silver  
gossamer is spun,  
Who paints the diapered  
fritillaries,  
On what wide wings  
from shivering pine to pine  
the eagle flies."  
—Oscar Wilde (1854-1900)*



Checker Lily (left)—called "diapered" by Oscar Wilde—and *Fritillaria persica* should be planted now for a showy spring.

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