

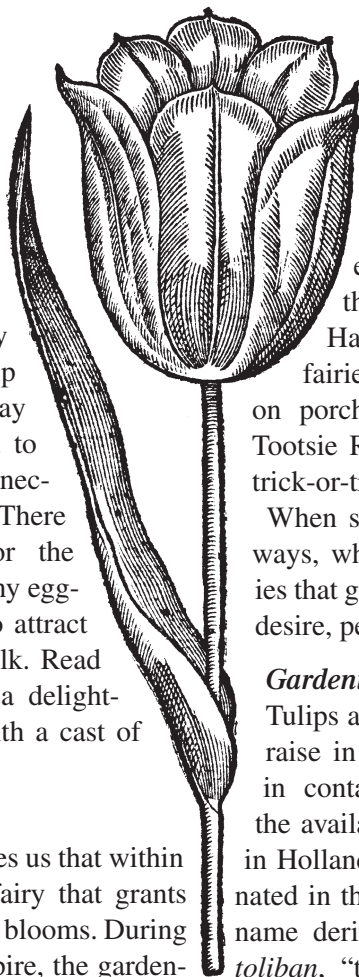
Tripping Through the Tulips

THIS year's Almanac features the mass craziness of Holland's seventeenth-century tulip frenzy. If the story aroused your own tulip consciousness, you may want to be introduced to their classic occult connection, the tulip fairy. There follows guidelines for the gardening of these satiny egg-shaped flowers, said to attract the benevolent little folk. Read on further and enjoy a delightful English folktale with a cast of giggling fairy babies.

Fairy affinity

An ancient belief assures us that within every tulip resides a fairy that grants wishes when the flower blooms. During the early Ottoman Empire, the garden-loving populace termed the red tulip "Perfect Love" – its nature purity as opposed to the lustful character of the red rose. The Victorian "Language of Flowers" roster echoed the more sedate symbolic character.

Down the centuries, artists, poets and business enterprises have embraced the image – tulip-fairy kitsch is virtually endless. It turns up with children's books, illustrations, tee-shirts,



films, greeting cards, posters, jigsaw puzzles and even tulip-fairy undies for the brain-bewitched. At All Hallow's Eve, small human fairies in red tutus and wings, on porches everywhere hoping for Tootsie Rolls, feel beautiful offering trick-or-treat bags.

When spring fever knocks us sideways, what could be bad about fairies that grant wishes and every heart's desire, perfect love?

Gardening guide

Tulips are unfussy creatures, easy to raise in your own garden, dazzling in containers and vases. Most of the available tulips have been grown in Holland, although the flower originated in the Middle East. Its botanical name derives from the Persian word *toliban*, "turban," which the inverted flower resembles.

Some gardeners prefer to plant them in clumps of at least ten of the same variety, arranged as spring borders or among foundation plants. Most tulip fanciers enjoy them massed in formal beds. More compact tulips, such as Kaufmaniana, are favorites for rock gardens.

Bulbs should be planted in mid-to-late fall for spring bloom in a sunny



area not subjected to high winds. Set in moderately loamy soil with enough added humus or sand for good drainage. Plant flat or root side down 4 to 5 inches deep, or as much as 6 inches for a taller variety. Space the bulbs about 6 inches apart. Water after planting to ensure a strong root system before the bulbs go into winter dormancy.

After the tulips flower, allow the leaves to wither before cutting to let the sap in the foliage return to the bulb for the next year. It is not necessary to lift the bulbs for the perennial varieties.; just keep the bed free of weeds. If you replant, lift the bulbs after the foliage has turned yellow. Store in a dry place during the summer. In the fall, replant the bulbs in fresh soil. Each year before

replanting, inspect the bulbs well and remove any with signs of bruises or cuts that might allow diseases to enter.

If you are growing your tulips in containers, avoid placing the container in direct sunshine. The soil needs to remain cool so it won't get the false message that spring has sprung and bloom prematurely before an adequate root system has developed.

The gardening effort is minimal for the seasonal joy it brings. The Marvell lines seem to describe the orderly elegance of tulips: "See how the flowers as at parade/ Under their colours stand display'd." Fairies or no fairies, perfect love or not-so-perfect love, we rejoice at the splendor of tulip leaves shining in the sun.



Sweet Sounds of Fairy Babies

ONCE UPON A TIME there was an old woman who lived by herself in a little house. She grew a bed of beautiful multi-coloured tulips in her garden, which she would cut and bring into the house, to cheer herself up. One night she was woken up by the sounds of sweet singing and of babies laughing. She looked out of the window and the sounds seemed to be coming from the tulip bed, but she couldn't see anything. The next morning she walked among her flowers, but there were no signs of anyone having been there the night before.

On the following night she was woken up again by sweet singing and the sound of babies laughing. She rose and stole softly through her garden. The moon was shining brightly on the tulip bed, and the flowers were swaying to and fro. The old woman looked closely and she saw, standing by each tulip, a little fairy mother who was crooning and rocking the flower like a cradle, while in each tulip cup lay a little baby fairy laughing and playing.



The old woman was a kind hearted soul, and so she stole quietly back to her house, and from that time on she never picked another tulip, nor did she allow her neighbours to touch them.

The tulips grew brighter in color and larger in size day by day, and they gave off a delicious perfume, like that of roses. They began to bloom all the year round too. And every night the little fairy mothers caressed their babies and rocked them to sleep in the flower cups.

Eventually, the day came, as it must, when the good old woman died, and the tulip bed was torn up by people who did not know any better, they didn't know about the fairies, they didn't know about the babies, and instead of tulips they planted parsley, but the parsley withered, and died, and so did all the other plants in the garden, and from that time on nothing would grow there.

But the good old woman's grave grew beautiful, for the fairies sang above it, and kept it green – while on the grave and all around it there sprang up tulips, daffodils, and violets, and all the other lovely flowers of spring.

– *English folk tale*

