Think spring

HOUSE & GARDEN Your plants may take a break when the growing season ends, but your garden dreams don’t. And neither do Jimmy Turner’s. The Dallas Arboretum’s director of research tries out new tulips every year with an eye toward the dazzling spring displays. Here are some of his picks for great looks at home. 1E
Tulip expert gives the how and when

Jimmy Turner, the Dallas Arboretum’s director of research, talks about the best-suited tulips for Texas and when and how to plant them.

IE
**Dutch treats**

The arboretum's plantsman renders a verdict on his tulip trials

By MARIANA GREENE

ou may think you know tulips, but Jimmy Turner knows tulips. As the Dallas Arboretum's director of research, Mr. Turner baby-sits about 200,000 tulip bulbs every year. Some are time-tested favorites that he can count on for the arboretum's showy spring display. But, being the passionate gardener that he is, Mr. Turner also has to try out a few tulips every year that are new to him—different colors, different combinations, different classes of bulbs. This autumn, the arboretum grounds staff will plant more than 150 varieties in trial beds.

In 1996, the Royal General Bulb-growers Association of the Netherlands divided tulips into three classifications: early, midseason and late. Within each are different flower sizes and shapes.

Dutch horticulturist Mr. Turner has definite opinions about what a tulip should provide. "The absolute best group of tulips for Texas," he asserts, "are the single late and double late groups. They are tall plants with large flowers. The earlier types often get hit by our late frosts and bloom so short they don't show well."

Don't plant tulips, he says, until the ground temperature reaches 50 degrees. If you find yourself without a soil thermometer (and, between you and me, who doesn't), try your tulips between Thanksgiving and New Year's. Garden professionals around here debate whether tulip bulbs must be pre-chilled for six weeks to bloom well. Mr. Turner says they need the cold to break dormancy, and unchilled bulbs, he claims, "are really short stems, if they flower at all." When you buy your bulbs, ask if they have been chilled! North Haven Gardens promotes 50 varieties that have been in the cooler's; otherwise, better clear out the vegetable bin in the refrigerator.

By now, it may be difficult to find enough tulips of one kind to plant a single-color display. But a bouquet of colors will be just as pleasing a sight, come March.

E-mail magreen@dallasnews.com