Fritillarias

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It's much easier to make a map now or take a photograph to show you spots where you could tuck in a few more spring bulbs. By late summer, if you are like me, you can't remember without this memory jog.

Have you tried Fritillarias? I'm quite enamored with these members of the lily family. Fritillaria meleagris, the snake's head or checkerboard lily, is a small nodding bell of purple or pure white. It likes a shady damp spot, although some gardeners find it a bit somber, but I don't.

The tall and showy Crown Imperial is brick red. The tuft of green leaves above the pendulous bells give it its name. It has a slight scent of fox. Planting the bulbs on their side, quite deeply and on a cushion of sand, in a dry sunny place gives the best results. The yellow variety is an easier color to use but very pricey to buy.

Another tall member of the family is Fritillaria persica with an abundance of small dark plum-colored bells and narrow gray foliage. It lasts for weeks and is an intriguing cut flower.

Still another variety, Fritillaria pallidiflora has short stems with a cluster of creamy bells.

These Fritillaria bulbs should be used, not instead of your spring favorites, but to extend the season of your garden. They all cut well and nothing seems to eat the bulbs or the flowers.

Joan Sargent, a longtime member and master gardener who passed away in August 2012; wrote about 24 gardening columns for NCBL through the years for our newsletter. We are reprinting them again.