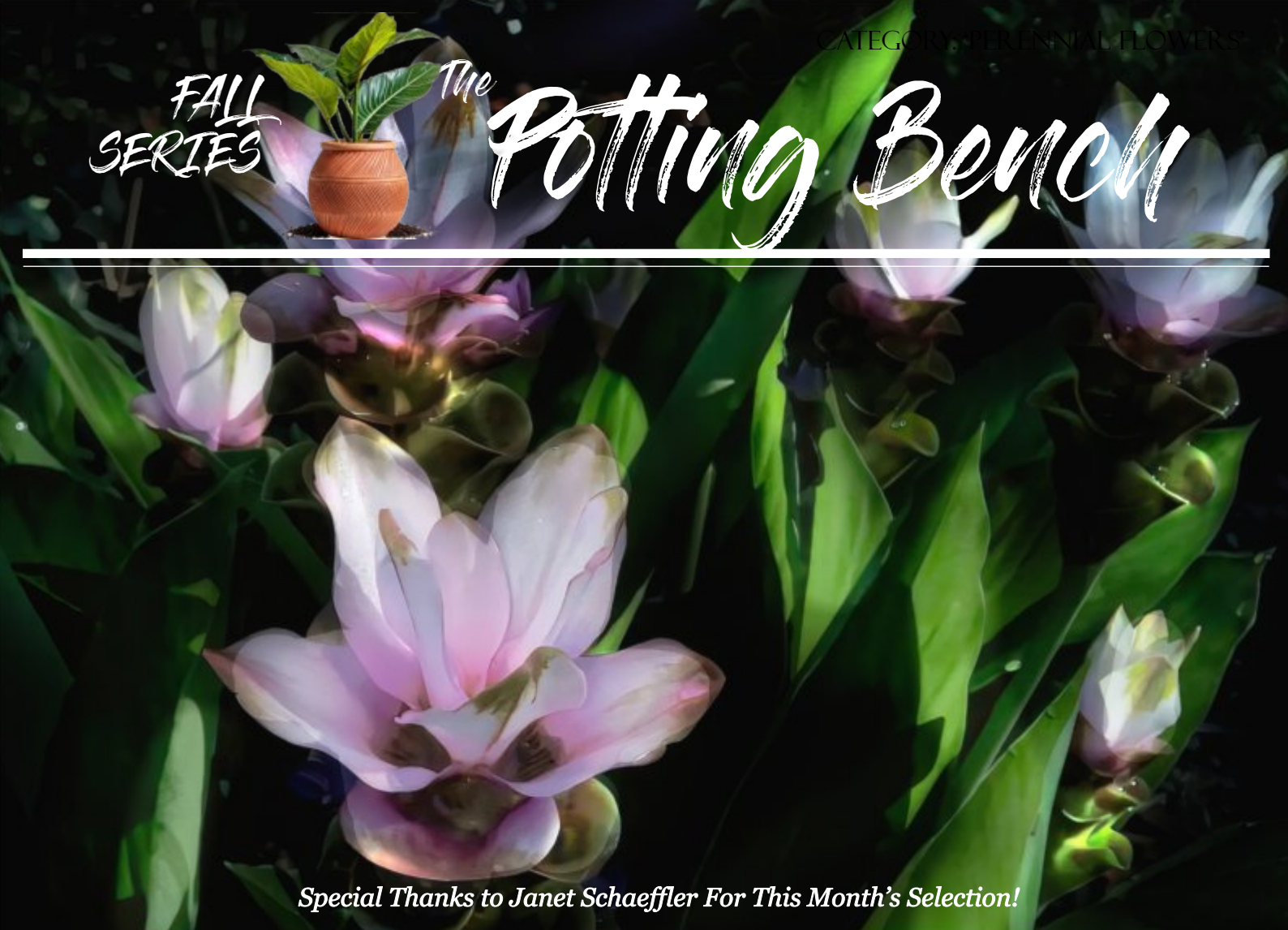


FALL
SERIES

The

Potting Bench



Special Thanks to Janet Schaeffler For This Month's Selection!

Sometimes we just want a splash of pure, tropical drama to light up our hot, humid North Florida summers. This month, we are highlighting the exotic and elegant Siam Tulip (*Curcuma alismatifolia*), and, being September, we're reaching the last stages of its presence here, starting our 'Fall Series' at The Potting Bench. Now we'll have fall and winter to plan our spring homage to this wonderful flower.

As so often happens with many common names (technically known as 'etymological misnomers' like 'Spanish Moss' or 'Pineapple') and despite its common name and cup-shaped blooms, the Siam Tulip is not a true tulip at all. It's a tropical perennial member of the ginger family (*Zingiberaceae*) native to Cambodia, Laos, and Thailand. It grows from fleshy, segmented underground rhizomes (not bulbs!) and produces incredibly long-lasting, waxy flower-like bracts that stand proud above its lush, lance-shaped leaves. And at Magnolia Point, it's a must have in any planting or foundation bed; they are downright iconic!

Sourcing Your Siam Tulips

Where to Buy: Active plants or rhizomes are found at local nurseries or online in spring and summer.

What to Look For: The waxy bracts come in gorgeous shades of pink, rose, lavender, and pure white. Look for popular cultivars like the soft-pink 'Pink Pearl', 'Green Jade', or 'Sunrise' (which features white bracts tipped in raspberry red).

The Hidden Surprise: Deep within the lower bracts, you will find tiny, true violet flowers peeking out, the 'Siamese twin', a delightful, colorful surprise!

Varieties

- **Pink:** Ranging from light rosé to bold magenta (such as standard *Curcuma alismatifolia*), representing the classic look.
- **White Wonder:** Features crisp, dazzling white summer bracts.
- **Sangria:** A striking red hybrid known for long-lasting color.
- **Solar:** Displays unique yellow bracts finished with fiery red tips.
- **Swing:** Showcases soft light pink bracts edged with wine-colored tips.
- **Torch Series:** Bred for strong, upright stems and vivid pink or purple torch-like displays.

Continued



Potting Bench



Warning: To keep humidity up, you can place containers on a pebble tray, but never mist the flowers directly, as this can spread *botrytis*, 'petal blight'.

Feeding: Siam Tulips are light feeders. Avoid high-nitrogen fertilizers, which will push floppy, leggy leaves instead of flowers. Instead, apply a slow-release balanced fertilizer at planting, or feed every two to four weeks during the blooming season with a potassium-rich fertilizer (like tomato feed) to prolong the lifespan of the gorgeous blooms. Stop feeding the moment the bracts begin to color up.

The Master's Touch: Winter Dormancy

If you want your Siam Tulip to return year after year, managing its mandatory 3-to-4-month dormancy period is absolutely critical.

1. **Taper Off (Autumn):** In September, as nighttime temperatures drop below 62°F, cut your watering frequency in half and stop fertilizing. The leaves will naturally begin to yellow from the tips, do not cut them yet, as they are still feeding the rhizome.
2. **Dry Out (Winter):** Once the foliage completely collapses and turns papery-brown, cut it back to the ground. Stop watering entirely.
3. **Store Safe:** If potted, move the container to a cool (55–60°F), dry, dark location like an unheated garage. Never water a dormant rhizome, or it will rot. In-ground rhizomes should be protected with a thick 3-inch layer of pine straw or bark mulch.
4. **Awaken (Spring):** In mid-to-late April, as the soil warms, bring them back into the light, resume watering, and watch your tropical tulips spring back to life!



Transplanting and Placement

- **Climate & Hardiness:** Siam Tulips are perfect for our gardens and are reliably perennial in our USDA Zone 9b they thrive as container plants on patios or indoors as houseplants.
- **The Perfect Light:** The ideal spot receives bright, filtered sunlight or morning sun with afternoon shade. The dappled shade of citrus or crepe myrtles, is perfect. Avoid direct midday sun, which can curl the leaves and brown the edges. However, keeping them in too much shade will shorten their blooming time and even cause the plant to collapse.
- **Soil and Drainage:** Like their ginger cousins, Siam Tulips demand fast-draining, slightly acidic to neutral soil (pH 5.8 to 6.8). They will quickly rot if left in heavy clay or soggy conditions. Amend our native soil with equal parts organic compost, coarse perlite, and pine bark fines. In containers, use a loose potting mix with plenty of drainage holes.

Maintenance

Precise Watering: During the active growing and blooming season (late spring through early fall), keep the soil lightly moist. A good rule of thumb is to allow the top third of the soil to dry out between waterings. Under-watering will cause the leaves to wilt or curl, while over-watering is the fastest way to trigger fatal root rot and "basal collapse".

Pests

Keep an eye out for mealybugs and spider mites hiding in the folds of the foliage.

Deer & Pets: While deer and rabbits will completely ignore your Siam Tulips, keep them out of reach of curious cats and dogs, as they are poisonous to pets if chewed on.

- STORY, PHOTOS: EDITOR

