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Tulip Bulbs: The Inside Story



by Mary Hosier

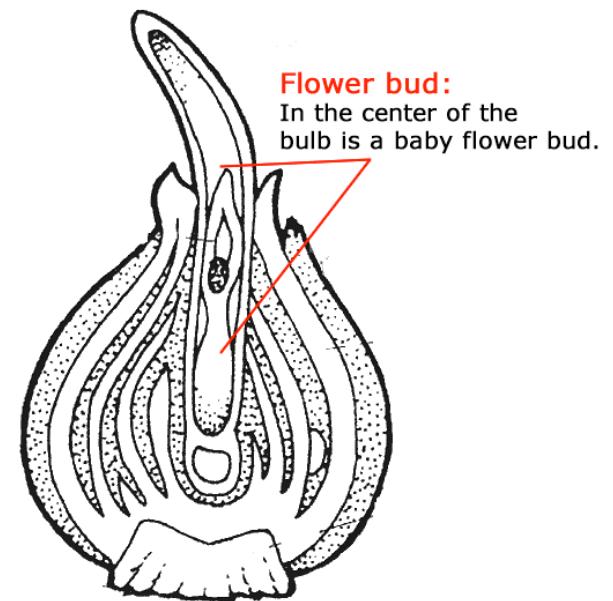
What is a Bulb?

A bulb is a specialized plant storage structure that contains everything the plant needs to survive winter and grow in the spring.



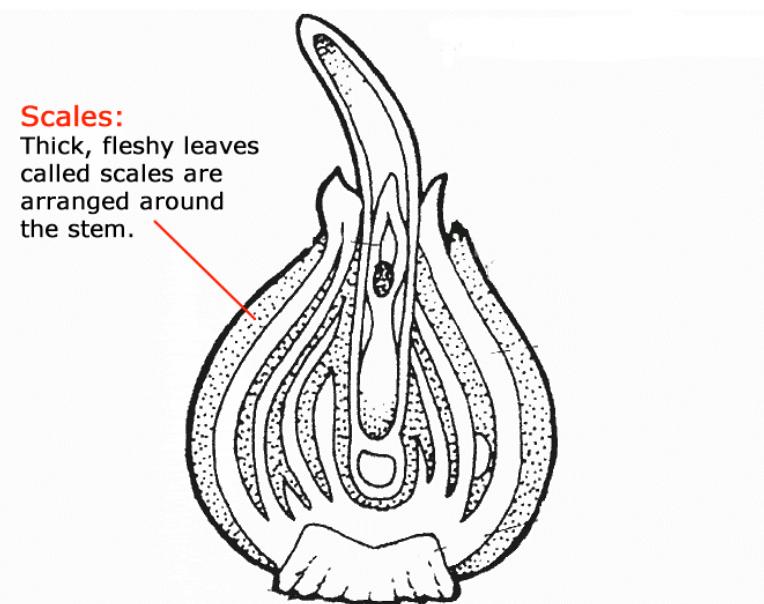
Find the Flower Bud

Cut open your bulb and look inside. Do you see the flower bud? This tiny bud will grow into the big red flower of the Red Emperor tulip. Why do you think it is found in the center of the bulb?



Thick for a Reason

When you cut open your bulb, did you notice that it was kind of wet and a little juicy? A bulb's thick, fleshy leaves, called scales store food and water to keep the bulb alive in cold and dry conditions.

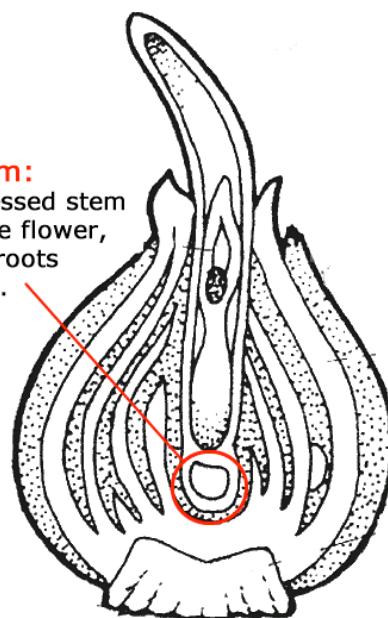


Scales:

Thick, fleshy leaves called scales are arranged around the stem.

Holding it All Together

The stem looks very short in the bulb, but it will grow and expand as spring arrives. This part of the bulb is very important. The compressed basal stem connects the scales, flower, and roots. New little bulbs will form from this basal stem as the tulip grows older.

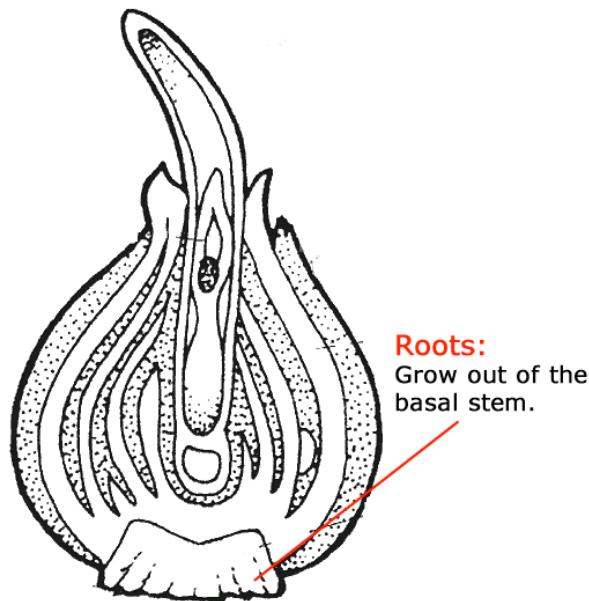


Basal Stem:

The compressed stem connects the flower, scales, and roots of the plant.

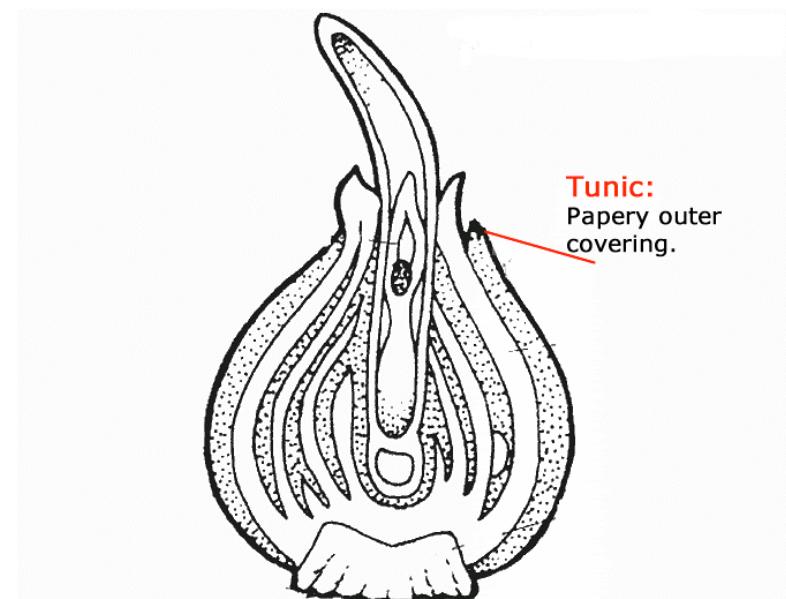
Stubby Roots

Roots emerge from the bottom of the bulb at the beginning of the growing season. Are the roots on your bulb short and stubby, or have some started to grow?



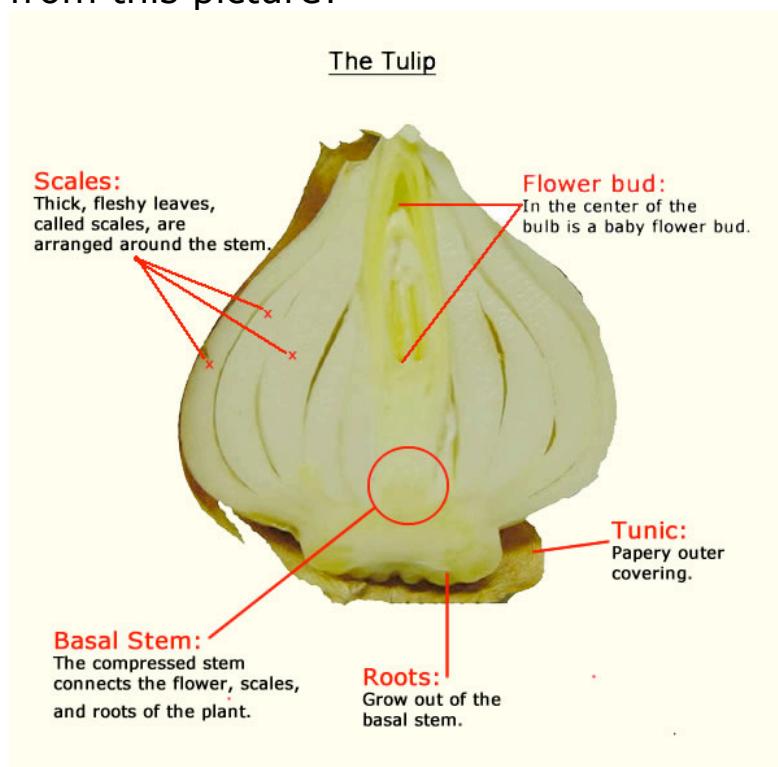
Wrapped in a Tunic

The tulip bulb is wrapped in a thin papery layer. This covering is called the tunic. It protects the leaf scales of the tulip bulb. What ways do you think the tunic might protect the bulb?



A Look at Your

Bulb Now you know all the parts of the bulb and have learned how their form helps the tulip survive. This photograph helps show what real bulbs look like. How is your bulb similar or different from this picture?



A Bulb with a Purpose

Your tulip bulbs will sit underground until spring arrives. Its specialized plant parts will protect it. In the spring when it starts to grow, the food and water inside will help it emerge and bloom.

