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An Inside Look

THE FIRST TULIP cultivar I grew was a Parrot type named 'Fantasy'. Its combination of salmon, apple-green, and cream coloring matched everything—paint, china, clothes, etc.—in my mother's decor.

Tulips were also a major part of my doctoral thesis. Using chromatography, which was at the time a new technology, I was able to trace the process by which tulips metabolize nitrogen. We were looking for the chemicals which triggered flowering. Instead, we discovered an acid (gamma amino butyric acid) that works as a natural antibiotic and prevents crushed tulip bulbs from rotting. It is also the reason for "tulip fingers." The sap from the bulbs breaks down proteins and caused my fingerprints to temporarily disappear.

Although we still tend to think of them as "Dutch" bulbs, the bulbs that first inspired the Dutch came mostly from Central Europe and the Mediterranean region, but plant hunters have since introduced an incredible variety of bulbs from all over the world. Because they have been cultivated so long, spring-flowering bulbs are the finest, most productive, and consumer-friendly horticultural product in the world. And the spring bulbs available today extend well beyond the traditional tulips, daffodils, and crocuses that Dutch growers have been cultivating since the 16th century.

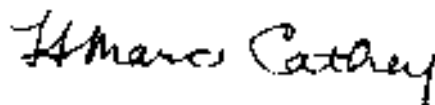
Thanks to the seasonal dormant stage bulbs go through, they have always been perfect for shipping to gardeners in the Northern Hemisphere. More recently, scientists have developed a perfectly timed regime of warming, chilling, and freezing that allows bulbs to also be marketed in the Southern Hemisphere.

Dutch growers and researchers have been sharing much of their specialized knowledge with us over the last couple of decades through a partnership with American scientists. This was initiated by August DeHertogh of North Carolina State University (recipient of the Society's 2002 H. Marc Cathey Award for achievements in horticultural research) and is now coordinated by William Miller of Cornell University in Ithaca, New York.

Lavish displays of spring bulbs will be just one part of the spectacle this spring, when the American Horticultural Society will hold its 58th Great American Gardeners Annual Conference in Washington, D.C., in partnership with the city's renowned National Cherry Blossom Festival. Fittingly, this year's conference, spread over nine days from March 29 to April 6, will celebrate early color in gardens from flowering bulbs and trees. All of the horticultural institutions in our nation's capital will be hosting special events, and of course there will be many activities here at George Washington's River Farm, including tours, lectures, workshops, and the Society's National Awards Banquet (see the box on page 11 for more information).

I hope you will plan now to join us in spring 2003. This will be an exciting opportunity to swap success stories and learn how to inspire all Americans with the beauty and importance of gardening.

Ever in green,



—H. Marc Cathey, *AHS President Emeritus*

