



Above.
Rich pink tulips with brownish-red viola - exciting and dramatic.

teams started at opposite ends of the park, planting onto the mix, which was later covered over with another 100mm. Bulb planting needs to be carefully scheduled so that those with different flowering lead times all arrive at their peak together, and with more than 1 million bulbs and annuals to get into the ground, there's still planting happening as late as June.

I've seen pretty drifts of flowering bulbs in cool climate gardens before, but nothing quite prepares you for the kapow of Floriade. It's how the designers work the colours together that's inspiring, especially the use of annuals as backdrop colour. By reinforcing the bulb colour with a deeper tone, the picture becomes almost electric. It's also surprising what works - if you'd told me you could back up rich pink tulips with brownish-red viola, I would have said absolutely no way, but there it is, looking very exciting and dramatic. Change the backdrop to white bellis, and the effect becomes delicate, girly and romantic, or use a rich purple and yellow viola and you have another look entirely.

The only part of the Floriade experience I don't understand is the intricate pictures that the designers lay out on the ground. Perhaps if you could see it all from a cherry picker it would make sense, but viewed across the ground plane the 'pictures' are too hard to make out.

But yes, I think you would learn something from Floriade. For landscape designers there are lessons about succession planning, managing intensive plantings, not being afraid to experiment with all kinds of colour combinations to create different moods, and using annuals for seasonal joy. Above all there's the lesson that gardens do not have to be enduring to be special or worthwhile; they can be an ephemeral work of art, like a desert blooming with western Australian daisies, an Andy Goldsworthy sculpture - or a sea of bulbs. **LD**

Floriade 2011 will be held at Commonwealth Park in Canberra from 17 September to 16 October 2011.

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