There’s a hidden treasure in the Niagara Escarpment, almost a secret garden. It’s the oldest garden at the Royal Botanical Gardens (RBG) on the border of Hamilton and Burlington. Created in 1932 in an abandoned quarry, it is called simply the Rock Garden.

Getting to it from the parking lot is a dubious walk near a highway and beneath an overpass, but once you arrive, it is worth it, especially in spring when the tulip display is in full splendour.
How to Care For Tulips

1. Make sure bulbs are firm.
2. Follow planting instructions.
3. Dig a hole the right depth: at least 2.5 times the diameter of the bulb.
4. Plant bulbs the right way (pointed tip) up.
5. Plant up to one foot deep to protect bulbs from squirrels.
6. Plant bulbs even if they’ve lost their “tunic” or brown paper covering.
7. Plant with proper spacing: planting too closely makes tulips weak, while planting too far apart gives a poor display.
8. To deter squirrels, try covering beds with chicken manure.
10. After flowering, let the leaves feed the bulb.
How to Get Great Effects With Tulips

1. Consider flowering times. It’s possible to get six weeks of flowers.
2. Choose a hot colour scheme, a subtle colour scheme, or introduce hot spots within subtle colours.
3. Plant single colours in specific shapes, such as contrasting colours in a yin/yang pattern.
4. For a formal look, plant rows of single colours and species in large numbers.
5. For a naturalized style, toss bulbs in the air and plant them where they fall.
6. Interplant tulips with other plants that echo their colour. Remember that vertical planting is just as important as horizontal planting.
7. Always plant more bulbs than you think are enough.

The steps up the Rock Garden inspire photographers and fine artists alike.
From 80,000 to 100,000 tulip bulbs are planted and lifted each year.
a few years ago, all the tulips were eaten by deer. Now there are 12-foot fences surrounding the Rock Garden.

Not everyone has the resources to create tulip displays like those at the RBG, yet they work well in small scale.

"People should plant bulbs," urges Gallagher. "People get tired by the fall, but gardens are so enhanced by spring bulbs. We see the first ones and think ‘Thank God we made it through winter!’"

Belinda Gallagher’s Top 10 Tulips

1. Tulipa ‘Gavota’ - a triumph tulip which is a rich shade of burgundy with cream and yellow and fares well in a container planting
2. Tulipa ‘Deidre’ - a viridiflora with a sculptural shape
3. Tulipa turkestanica – a lovely little pale yellow species tulip with terrific seed heads
4. Tulipa ‘Little Beauty’ – small and early flowering is bright magenta with a navy blue centre and fragrant
5. Tulipa kaufmanniana ‘Waterlily’ – big, big flowers on short plant, creamy white with red streak
6. Tulipa ‘Queen of the Night’ – a Darwin that is almost black and a good returner
7. Tulipa ‘Antoinette’ – bouquet or multi-flowering and the colour changes in 3 stages
8. Tulipa ‘Monte Carlo’ – fragrant, double early tulip that is Big-Bird yellow
9. Tulipa clusiana – my favourite species, looks delicate but is tough as nails. The cultivar T. ‘Cynthia’ is the most readily available.
10. Tulipa ‘Negrita’ – a triumph tulip that is dark purple and also a good returner

Spring Glory: RBG’s Tulip Garden

Hot colours dazzle on cool spring days.
Grape hyacinths frame a few mauve tulips beautifully.

Underplanting a magnolia tree with pink tulips creates a stunning wall of colour.

The top part of the RBG Rock Garden invites you to stop and admire the view.