

Daffodils

Of all the bulbs that spring with Spring, the narcissi are probably our favorite. Of course, living here, you might prefer to keep a contrary opinion silent? We plant them because they are pretty close to a 'forever' plant: because they are poisonous they are not devoured by voles, dug up by squirrels, nor nipped by deer. They do vanish from time to time probably from lack of essential care.

To ensure that the bulb is strengthened for the next year, dead head the blooms unless you want them to go to seed. You may not need to do this if you've brought armfuls of them inside and filled all the vases.

Those double Raggety Ann blooms that flourish along roadsides and in fields have local names such as 'butter and eggs' but don't appear in the AHS A to Z Encyclopedia so I have no idea of their pedigree. They may be assigned to Narcissus division 13 perhaps? The divisions are based on differing flower forms and they contain bulbs of garden origin except for Division 10, composed of wild species. The encyclopedia is a 1997 edition and lists 12 divisions. However, the Brent & Becky's Bulbs catalog more. There is Division 11 and Division 11A collar daffodils, a really (split corona) fun group where the usual trumpet is laid back like a collar. There is a new one pictured in their catalog, 'Exotic Mystery', an elegant flower "registered as yellow it is more green than yellow throughout most of its life". Division 11B is the Papillon daffodil and Division 12 is 'other' and in the final group, Division 13 the bulbs are distinguished only by their botanical names.

Gloucester is fortunate to have a world class source of both information and beauty in Brent and Becky's Bulbs in Ware Neck. Visit their garden and shop and come away with lessons for planting next fall. To a 'bulbaholic' favorite daffodils are like favorite boyfriends to a teenage girl. Most of us have a new favorite weekly!

I love the early small ones with swept back perianth segments and a long trumpet and of course the masses of elegant 'Thalia' opening white under the opening white bracts of the Dogwood and the sturdy 'Ice Follies' white with a yellow trumpet. In another garden 'Mount Hood' was a lovely white in a cooler spring but I haven't seen it recently. 'Saint Keverne' is showing foliage and will have a light lemon color touched with lime and stays lovely no matter how summer-hot spring is.

I should write down where I put bulbs since eventually the labels meander. The bulbs of 'Salome' can be damaged just because there is a bare spot for a hole and the spade-wielder has forgotten what is where. After a while for all of us forgetting overtakes remembering but occasionally the right name will pop into our head when we see a familiar face. For example, some treasures are well named. Walking along the driveway it will be easy for me to greet 'Sailboat' by name, not because of a good memory but the charming swept back petals look like a sailboat. The dearly loved ones are along the driveway to counteract the headline-gloom that results from that walk to the paperbox.

Although daffodils are easily grown and long lasting, you can shorten their lives by hacking off the foliage before it browns naturally. And for heaven's sake, don't knot it up and put a rubber band around it! If you can't stand a degree of disorder, stick in those plastic daffodils that look just fine if you are passing them at fifty miles per hours.

The fading daffodil foliage can be very well disguised by emerging daylily foliage or, if the area is semi-shady by hostas. I tried planting hostas in hardware cloth cages to deter voles but

they lost their tops to deer. The ones I planted in large plastic pots petered out as the roots were choked. C'est la vie! Eventually some enterprising breeder will insert a daffodil gene into daylilies and hosta so they become poisonous? Actually deer wait until the daylilies are about to bloom and then 'chomp', but the foliage is a nice upright accent even de-bloomed. If you plant bulbs in their own bed rather than tucking them in here and there as I do, you can more easily add compost to keep the soil healthy in the bed. Their flourishing ultimately depends on the health of the soil in which they are grown.

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