



florida daffodil society news

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OUT AND ABOUT

In February, Linda Van Beck started the season with a garden circle program in Traveres. In March, she went to Chipley and visited the Holmes Washington Technical School, where FDS has a demo garden, then on to the Alabama Master Gardeners State Convention in Dothan. The MG's enjoyed her new presentation, which included much of the information in recent FDS newsletters on bulb behavior. The second talk was standing room only. There was a great interest in daffodils and a need for specific information. The talk was billed as Daffodils and Daffodilians in Alabama, but the second talk was reduced to 45 minutes so there were no daffodilians! The FDS owes a great deal of thanks to the interest, guidance and daffodil bulbs that Weldon Childers of Carbon Hill, Alabama gave to our Society. Thanks are also given to Sara Van Beck for her permission to use materials from her ADS journal article on growing daffodils in zones 7a and 7b. Catalogues were collected from Old House Gardens, Mitsch Bulbs, Terra Ceia and Brent and Becky's Bulbs. More than five hundred catalogs were given away. A special thanks to FDS member Jean Inscho, who instigated the invitation to give a program, provided bed and breakfast and was in charge of all the food.

FLOWER SHOWS

Each year it is different but everyone agreed that this time we "got it right"! At the new and improved entrance into the greenhouse, greeters handed out free flowers and literature (Greeters: Carol Allen, Jean & Bob Denk, Mary Ann Tonnacliff, Lori Johnson, Bearnice Ford, Marge Orrick, Tiffany Bourassa and Lennie Kennedy) Co-Chair Lori Johnson arranged the blooms into species, historic and moderns. Most were installed at eye level. Some were interspersed with bunches of flowers on a green sheeted surface. These green sheets neatly

covered the adjacent space where arrangements were displayed by designers Tracey Allen, Oberley Brown, Cynthia Csikos, Mary Maude & Bill Sharpe, Gunilla Truell and Charlotte Watkin. Susan and Bill Reed exhibited show quality blooms in the members exhibition space. Co-Chairs Pete and Emily Millett helped install and break down the show.

We had a good, interested crowd and received twenty-two memberships. The list of flowers displayed will be in the next newsletter.

The Van Beck garden was toured by the Senior Center Activities Group, Shannon Forest Garden Circle and interested FDS members. Next year the garden will open in February.

Thinking of flower shows – three cheers to the Thomasville Garden Club (Georgia) which not only had a flower show but put on a jazz concert (kids from the local high school and college) and a luncheon with a serious program. They didn't charge much for lunch, and said donations for the show would be accepted. Now that's good planning! Everything at the same place!

The next flower show was the Georgia Daffodil Society ADS Flower Show. "Bring flowers; they have had sleet in Tennessee. Bring enough flowers to fill 3 of a kind". So flowers were taken, but my table mate Nancy Robinson said "they had to all look the same, same number of florets, same stage of flower development, all had to face the judges and be in a straight line – vertical or horizontal in their test tube. With frozen joints, that was not going to happen. So Linda went for help. Trevithian later fell apart. Silver Chimes was bumpy, but Katherine Bull's wonderful pinching and poking won the day for Erlicheer – a huge ribbon for the best Historic Group of Three. As an American Daffodil Society regional director, Linda got to go to the judges luncheon. On return to the auditorium, filled with light and daffodils, there was a problem. We could either go home or go to the bomb shelter!

Sara Van Beck, President of the Georgia Daffodil Society, closed the show and we went to her home. That tornado did not come, but there were 15 minutes of hail, wind and rain.

It was interesting to note what daffodils were blooming at the same time but more than 400 miles apart. Examples were Kedron, Golden Dawn, Hoopoe, Erlicheer (just opening in Atlanta & finishing in Tallahassee), Sugar Cups and John's Old Fashion. What wasn't nice was that the Division 2, Ceylon, Fortune, etc. not only were really bright but much bigger than those in Tallahassee. A higher diet of fertilizer and less crowding for the big cups might help, but then again, it is probably the difference in prevailing temperatures as more cold means more vigor for most daffodils.

THE BULB SALE COMETH

Noting that your gorgeous daffodils could be more gorgeous yet if you had a lot more of them? Green with envy over that particular daf you saw in a neighbor's garden? Now's your chance to plan for next spring – Call Clara Jane Smith (850-385-3324) if you want a particular bulb available for the FDS Bulb Sale.

GROWTH

Harold Hume used the term "fixed adaptation" to describe a plant's inability to change outside a given range. This term is a good way to explain why daffodils originating from certain climates, altitudes and soils differ and how that difference remains in modern varieties.

One part of the bulb's anatomy that is not often mentioned is the meristem. Michael Jefferson-Brown in his 1991 Narcissus Book describes the formation of bud or buds at the junction of the current or previous season's flower growth. This apex is the meristem – the growing point of the basal plate. Triggered by an increase of soil temperature the bud is started and an embryo flower "will be forming before the current year's growth has died down."

"Forcing" daffodils is an old and still common practice. John Van Beck always said that forcing bulbs was just a way of letting Northerners have their bulbs bloom at the same time as they bloom for us.

According to George Harmon Scott, author of Bulbs: How to Select, Grow and Enjoy (HP Books, 1982), bulbs cannot be forced. When you force bulbs in soil, you are "simulating the natural conditions that cause bulbs to bloom". For growers of early blooming bulbs in the Coastal South, the following times and temperatures are real. This is Scott's "forcing formula":

Stage 1 Plant Bulbs September through October

Stage 2 Dark Root Period Pot is in the closet (ours is in the ground). Time period 12 to 16 weeks. Bulb is making roots. Temperature ranges around 45° F.

Stage 3 Top Growth Period Pot is placed in sunshine. Bulb is putting up leaves and stem. Time 2-3 weeks. Temperature 55° to 65° F

Stage 4 Buds to Blooming Temperatures up to 75°

Example: February Gold – if the bulb is planted the last week of September or already in the ground, the dark root stage is fifteen weeks, top growth two or more weeks depending on temperatures. Bloom is the first week in February. The later the planting, the later the blooming. On its own, February Gold has with few exceptions bloomed the first week of February for over fifteen years in the Van Beck garden. This year was an exception.

Comment: If temperature hits freezing point, growth ceases. This year, early freezing disrupted and halted bloomers – especially Carlton and Ice Follies in established plantings. Newly purchased/planted bulbs were on a later schedule and bloomed. If temperature is above 55° F in Stage 2, the bulb may start premature top growth. Everything the bulb does is time and temperature dependent. Rule of thumb – one month from bulb up to blooming.

Conclusion: The majority of early blooming bulbs take twelve to sixteen weeks for full root development. Tazettas, such as Paper Whites, that bloom October to January, add roots (many have roots all year), start sooner and may take as little as five to six weeks to bloom and the leaves continue to grow long after blooming.

BULB PULLING

Scott's chapter on bulb propagation shows a bulb being torn apart. He cautions that the bulb should be mature and the offsets should pull apart easily. The concern is the bulb and offset will be damaged and thus susceptible to basal rot. If an offset is "holding on by a thread", pull. The only good roots are those that "spring free". Make sure that the offset and the mother bulb feel dry before planting. Many bulbs are related to Greta Garbo – "I want to be left alone" Large tazetta bulbs, when dug, open up and fall apart like a bunch of bananas. Chinese Sacred Lily will make small bulblets that can be replanted. If you want to know what's going on, count noses. When the new growth looks substantial, there may be an offset ready to leave home. As a rule, if the bulb retains even a small part of the basal plate, it will grow.

EXCEPTIONS TO THE RULE

So many daffodils have rotted due to summer sprinklers and yet gardeners in Palm Coast (on the Atlantic) and now Mary Peterzen of Navarre (Gulf coast) are saying that once or twice a week summer sprinkling has not affected their daffodils. Mary is even talking about dividing her dafs. It could be that the sand is not cooled or stays wet long enough to affect the bulbs and that tazettas versus other types may not be as susceptible. Daffodils in garden soil would tend to rot. As usual, one needs more than a year to know if bulb growth has been adversely affected.

DISAPPOINTMENT

The FDS will not be able to plant a replica Florida tazetta bulb farm (a couple of rows) at the Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens. The format of the gardens has changed and space is at a premium. If you have any ideas on a site, preferably in the St. John's River basin where the historical farms were located, please let us know.

HISTORIC GARDENS

Information on early historic daffodils in Florida is hard to come by (the find of a 1880-90 bulb catalog was a good start). Currently, Sara Van Beck is researching Georgia gardens.

One person who did start recording information was George Stritikus, an Alabama Extension Agent in Birmingham, who loved old gardens and numbers. He asked three questions: "What could they have used? What did they use? What was typical?" By 1999, he had collected information from the late 1600's to 1960. His 61 item source list (Alabama gardens only) found gardens comprised of the following:

- Shrubs – 34%, of which roses make up 72%
- Herbaceous – 31%, of which bulbs made up 22%
- Trees – 30%, of which fruit trees made up 64%
- Vines – 5%

Total number of identifiable references is 4,822 out of a total of 7,600 listings in a database of plant names.

The herbaceous materials referenced were 539 flowers, 355 vegetables, 197 bulbs (of which 30 were daffodils).

Gardens are lumped into three time periods:

- Early, Pre-Civil War: "an early interest in daffodils": N. x intermedius, N. x odorus, Chinese Sacred Lily and N. pseudonarcissus pseudonarcissus.
- Golden Age (1850-1900): Late in this period a renewed interest in species and trumpets after 1880. Common daffodils: Grand Primo, aka Old Fashion, and Double Campernelle.
- Late (1901-1960): Interest in bulbs, especially minor bulbs and all daffodils.

To which double campernelle was George Stritikus referring? In the Van Beck garden, two variants exist. The early blooming N. x odorus plenus – a small lovely bright yellow mass exhibited in every FDS flower show, courtesy of a week or two of refrigeration. This year, N. x odorous flore pleno, known as Queen Anne's double jonquil, bloomed in mid-March. The yellow rose of many petals is slightly smaller than the early bloomer. Both are rare, found only in old gardens, hate to be moved, have wonderful fragrance and have no intention of multiplying, but, weather permitting, bloom every year.

DATE OF INTRODUCTION

We have a date of introduction – it's called "birthday". Historic landscape designers and horticulturists are always looking for dates. Plants or trees, cultivars or species, when did they arrive in America? Tad Howard's Bulbs for Warm Climates has the date of introduction listed right after the bulb's name. Only a few bulbs plus daffodils do not have a date. Early daffodils have only British dates courtesy of the Royal Horticultural Society. Other dates that are often mentioned and used interchangeably include first in trade or commerce. With any date there are problems of validity, popularity and time lag, but it is not too late to start developing American "birthdays". Sara Van Beck has started researching dates of introduction for daffodils and we hope to obtain interest and guidance from the American Daffodil Society's historic committee and the ADS board at the upcoming April convention in Richmond, Virginia. When you study old gardens you need dates of introduction.

HISTORICAL SOURCES

The following are two examples of information on historic daffodils. The first was found by FDS member Weeg Broderson in the Dorothy Dodd Collection of the Florida State Library: A catalog published in 1889-90, by Commercial Nurseries proprietor Chas. A. McBride of 64½ West Bay Street, Jacksonville, Florida. Title: Fruits, Ornamental Trees, Shrubs, Roses, Etc.

The catalog includes 258 varieties of gladioli, and on the last page with asparagus and rhubarb, are the following daffodils:

- Poeticus Ornatus (10¢, \$5 a hundred)
- Poeticus Recurvus
- Golden Trumpet – for forcing
- Giant Princes – for forcing
- Obvallaris -- for cutting
- Pallidus Praecox and Trumpet Major -- bedding and forcing

Chalis Flowered Narcissus:

- Fairy – orange scarlet perianth, yellow cup
- Incomparabilis – Great Nonsuch Daffodil in varying shades and sizes. Fragrant.
- Incomparabilis Stella --- "Will become very popular for forcing. Blooms early, very handsome perianth pure white with distinct yellow cup."

The second is an article from the *New York Times*, published: April 30, 1893:

THE DAY OF THE DAFFODIL.

The daffodil is coming to displace the chrysanthemum. Of course, we have always had the daffodil and other common varieties of the narcissus with us, and people of good taste have appreciated the modest little flower at its worth. But the daffodil has never been fashionable, if it has not been actually despised; it has bloomed in old gardens, and, as one of the early blossoms of uncertain Spring, the yellow flower of the *narcissus pseudo-narcissus* has been welcome and worth the gardeners' while to cultivate.

But now there is a genuine boom in daffodils in London, and, as fashions travel westward, the overcultivated chrysanthemum will probably soon be displaced in the buttonhole of the fastidious and "quick" New-Yorker by the modest daffadowndilly of the Elizabethan poets.

They are having daffodil shows in London now, and from the gardens of the Scilly Islands, many of the inhabitants of which make their living by cultivating the narcissus, it is said that Londoners have lately received five hundred tons of the flowers—which, it seems, ought to be a good many daffodils.

In the elaborate floral decoration of the dinner table the yellow daffodil has lately been used here, but not to the exclusion of any other available flower. The fad has not reached us yet. But it is sure to come. Of course, the narcissus will be cultivated until the little garden flower will no longer be able to recognize its relatives. Many new and pretentious varieties of the narcissus have been produced in London, and high-sounding names have been bestowed upon them. The daffodil will grow in size and change its shape and take on all sorts of odd colors; and then will be supplanted by some other flower, and return to the old function fair *Perdita* allotted to it, to come before the swallows dare to and "take the winds of March with beauty."

CENTRAL FLORIDA: Please let us know how your dafs bloomed. Email Linda Van Beck at Ivanbeck@comcast.net
