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# florida daffodil society news

Special Issue

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## Sunburst, Daffodil Clock, and Solar System?

As a boy growing up in the 60's in rural southwestern Virginia I remember dull, dreary, windy, winter days in March. Gray skies, gray leafless forests and pastures in various shades of brown. This made it all the more striking when I would wander across a brilliant yellow patch of daffodils seemingly hidden in the middle of a pasture. Some of these patches were 25 to 50 feet across. A rock foundation was always nearby, the only remnant of a house long gone. My mom had daffodils in her flower beds around the house. She and her friends called them jonquils. She had this wooden dibble she used to plant the bulbs in the heavy, tight, bright red, clay topsoil. No matter how hard the winter, daffodils could always be trusted to return each year.

I came to Florida in 1992 after having traveled around the country as a soil scientist and agronomist. I really didn't think daffodils were perennial in Tallahassee. I thought they were like tulips, blooming the first year then fading away and not being robust enough to ever bloom again. I categorized them with peonies, iris, crocus and lily of the valley as Virginia favorites that melt in Florida. I did not see daffodils in the eastern Tallahassee neighborhoods and my sister-in-law who had been an avid gardener for 20 years in Pensacola knew no one who grew daffodils. I had lived about 5 years in Tallahassee before I came across bulbs at Native Nurseries, a trusted retailer, knowledgeable in everything they sell. It was easy for them to sell me as I wanted to get back a childhood memory. So I tried a few bulbs and much to my delight even in my sandy, infertile and sometimes droughty backyard they flourished year after year.

In 2008 I unofficially became the head gardener at Unity Eastside Church by default. All the church gardeners before me had either died, left the church or gotten tired of taking care of the 24 acres of church grounds. Daffodils were on my list to add to the grounds. The call to the congregation for bulbs got no response as apparently none of them were familiar with daffodils. So the next few years I bought a few bulbs from Native Nurseries and tithed them to the church soil. Eventually my backyard daffodils were old enough to lift and

separate and they became a major source for the church. At church I discovered a patch of some type of bulbed plants about 6 inches tall growing under the pines. I did not know what they were but I was pretty sure they needed more sun and less mowing. Having a hunch they were daffodils, I waited for the foliage to die back in June before I transplanted them to the full sun in front of the bookstore. It would be 2 years before they recovered enough to bloom and reveal that they were *Narcissus 'Carlton'* (Division II: 2 Y-Y).

When the church got a new sign on Buck Lake Road (picture 1), I created a circular flower bed around it in 2012, outlined it with limestone rock and filled it with the rescued daffodils. I thought I had dug up every bulb from the bookstore bed, but the next February proved me wrong. I have learned that there seems to be a tithe of bulbs that remain behind whenever you are transplanting. You can see in the picture taken in March, 2016 the road sign with the *Carlton*s blooming. Rays of a sunburst that stream out into the lawn were added the next year from bulbs I bought in our annual FDS bulb sale. We are in the fourth year of the sunburst experiment in the lawn. In February of each year I start looking for the emerging daffodils and mark the rays of the sunburst with orange surveyor pin flags so the person changing the lettering on the sign knows where not to step. Each year more congregants get excited when the pin flags appear in the lawn knowing the daffodils are soon to follow. The flags are removed once the daffodils are well up. I hand weed and use a weed eater around the daffodils which are not mowed until the foliage dies usually by the first week of June. It has been a very dry fall and I spent this weekend watering the area. I also lightly mulched the bed with fallen pecan leaves and will be adding ash and charcoal from the bonfire pit as we prepare for the holiday fires. The companion plants with the daffodils inside the limestone ring are *Coreopsis* (tickseed) which is our state wildflower (yellow bloom) and roadside *Verbena* (purple). I think you can see from the picture why daffodils may have come to mind for some winter color relief in the dull gray leafless pecan grove with gray Spanish moss. In the photo you can also see a small triangle of daffodils which is where the irrigation pipe comes out of the ground. This bed has extra *Carlton*s meant for filling in the gaps of the sunburst rays if I could ever get around to doing it.

Uphill from the sunburst (picture 2) is a center circle of Narcissus 'Ice Follies' (Division II: 2 W-Y) put in three years ago with two outer circles of *Ice Follies* planted two years ago. About 30 feet out from the center of the circle are 12 circular beds (30 inches in diameter) planted last fall each with a different type of daffodil. This creates the daffodil clock designed to have the noon bed (when facing north to the road) with *Autumn Colors* to bloom first followed by *Nony* in the one o'clock bed going around with *Soleil D'or*, *Ceylon*, *Sweetness*, *Monal*, *Trviathan*, *Avalanche*, *Golden Dawn*, *Itzim*, *Tresamble* and finally ending with *Bridal Crown* in the 11 o'clock bed which should bloom last. Last year's warm winter seemed to upset blooming times. We will see this year if the sequence of blooming is more to the traditional times. If not, there is always some transplanting that can be done. I could not find these beds yesterday (Veteran's Day) as the grass had fully recovered and showed no evidence from last year's weeding, planting, and mulching. Once I find one bed, all of the remaining beds will be easy to find since they are in a clock pattern. Future plans on the church grounds may include a tribute to our solar system with the sun and orbiting planets done with various types of daffodils in circular beds.

I first met Linda Van Beck in spring 2010 as she was tending the FDS table at the Tallahassee Garden Club's open house. I was president of the Magnolia Chapter of Native Plant Society at the time and helping with the native plant booth. Towards the end of the day as the crowds thinned I walked around to see the other booths. Before that day I did not know there was a Florida Daffodil Society. It was wonderful to meet and

talk to a person so knowledgeable and passionate about daffodils. I joined the FDS immediately. I am a big believer in native plants and that sense of time and place that they bring but daffodils hold a special place in my yard as part of my cultural heritage. And thanks to the FDS my cultural heritage grows each year and I cannot help but believe that my neighbors, members of my church and anybody driving down Buck Lake Road are getting a dose of it each year from February to April. Over 90% of the daffodils that I have planted at home and at church have come from the FDS annual bulb sale. A thousand thanks for all who help with the annual bulb sale. I love reading the descriptions and seeing the pictures on the bulb sale form. It becomes a reference document that I save on my computer. And even though I have to practice some restraint when ordering bulbs, I so enjoy learning about new varieties, visualizing the possible and planning the next daffodil landscape creation.

My last story comes from my mom. She said that my father in the last years of his life would go out on the cold March days and cut jonquils that were still tight in the green bud stage and place them in a vase with warm water on the kitchen table. She always thought that he had cut them too early but was pleasantly surprised as they eventually opened and fully bloomed. My dad was born in 1912. His mom was born in 1878. I wonder if he learned about cutting green bud daffodils from his mom. I wonder if they knew the people who lived in those houses that now are only rock foundations surrounded by daffodils.

James Cooper

