



DAFFODIL CULTURE

Daffodils are some of the easiest flowers to grow. I've heard some people jokingly say they just dig a hole, drop in the bulb, cover with soil, and then stomp it down! And this is really all it takes. But as with any plant, the better you prepare the soil, the better the flowers will be, and the happier your plant will be. For starters, you should buy bulbs from a reputable dealer. A good bulb has a flower in it when it is sold for autumn planting. Give-away bulbs, unless from a trusted source, are of dubious value. Bargain bulbs from other than reputable dealers are not bargains. Never buy or plant a soft daffodil bulb, because a soft bulb usually means basal rot or other disease.

Daffodils are not particular about soil type, and will grow in acid or alkaline soils, heavy clay or sandy. They will grow in light shade, but do better in full sun. Deep shade keeps them from blooming after the first year or two. I think the main requirement is plenty of moisture from the time they are planted until they finish growing in the late spring. A good soaking once a week is not too much. However, the soil must drain well. Though they are not particular about soil, the better the soil preparation is at the beginning, the better your daffodils will perform over a period of years. Prepare the planting area as deeply as you can—the deeper the better, as that will give your bulbs good soil for the root run. Add any organic materials (compost, fine pine bark, etc.) as needed, and a complete, low nitrogen fertilizer (3-6-6 or 5-10-10 (about 1/4 cup per square foot). Be sure the fertilizer does not come in direct contact with the bulbs. NEVER use fresh manure. Bonemeal is not recommended—in fact its use is discouraged. After planting, cover the beds with mulch. Mulch serves many purposes. It helps keep down weeds. Mulch also keeps the flowers clean and helps keep the soil cool in the summer. Shredded bark and pine straw are good mulches; peat moss is not a good mulch, as it tends to make a hard crust, making it difficult for water to penetrate.

Daffodils should be planted in the Fall when the soil has cooled, if possible, or any time until the ground freezes. Most root growth is done in the fall and early winter. Bulbs of normal size should be planted about six inches deep. Smaller bulbs should be placed at lesser depths. A shallow planting will require more frequent lifting and division as the bulbs tend to split up more quickly. Plant them about six inches apart; groups of three planted in a triangle will make a nice display in the garden. Don't hesitate to buy just one of a choice cultivar though. It will soon multiply into a nice clump. Daffodils are informal flowers, so don't line them up in a row like so many soldiers on parade unless you're planting a cutting garden or an exhibition bed.

If the spring is dry, the flower beds should be watered (an inch a week) to keep the foliage green as long as possible. Don't cut the leaves from your choice cultivars. Sunlight on the leaves is necessary to form the flower for the following year. And please, please don't cut off or braid the sprawling green foliage to tidy up the garden. Doing so severely limits the short time that the bulb has to make its growth and form next year's flower. If you must, you can safely remove the foliage six weeks after the bulbs have finished flowering. But it's better to wait until the foliage has yellowed, or dried up, to remove it; then cultivate the ground a bit, so that insects do not have a path down the hole left by the foliage directly to the bulbs.

Daffodil bulbs divide, and one bulb will in time become a clump of bulbs. They should be dug and divided when the flowers become smaller and fewer. Dig as the foliage turns yellow, store until fall in a cool, airy place. Do not forcefully break the side shoots off of the bulbs.

Newly purchased bulbs already have the flower bud developed when you receive them, and should produce a bloom the following spring. If you have received a bulb that is not true-to-name (and if the catalog says it's white, and your flower is yellow and red—you'll know!) or the bulb fails to grow, a polite letter to the dealer will usually bring a replacement bulb or refund. But remember that some daffodils take several days to acquire the "catalog color" (i.e., whites that open pale yellow, or pinks that open yellow-orange; colors will be at their best in a cool, moist season). It is not uncommon for bulbs to fail to flower, or give small blooms, the second year in your garden—they are busy adapting to your soil, your climate, and your care. By the third season they should repay you with a generous supply of lovely blooms.