

Dazzling, deer-resistant daffodils

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(Photo: Kitsap Sun)

As summer wanes, my grandkids and I are passionately studying bulb catalogs. Since deer adore tulips, we're concentrating on daffodils, which have never yet been nibbled in my gardens. Daffodils are tougher than tulips in several ways; they are pest-, disease- and drought-resistant, and very long-lived when given suitable conditions.

How long? Here on Bainbridge Island, heritage bulbs planted long ago by Mary Sam, a Native American midwife, have been blooming for about a century. Poet's Narcissus daffodils that bloomed around our first Bainbridge home were planted in 1908. That's a pretty good longevity track record.

Pleasing daffodils isn't difficult but does take some thought. Like many bulbs, they do well in clay-based soils as long as they get to dry out in summer. Keeping them outside of any summer irrigation pattern is one key to long-term success. Planting them in areas that don't stay naturally damp well into summer is similarly important, as is planting at the proper depth (usually 4-6 inches). Daffodils persist best when allowed to ripen their foliage fully, so plant them where the browning leaves aren't going to annoy you. It helps to intersperse them with drought-resistant perennials such as lady's mantle (*Alchemilla mollis*). This sturdy, hard-working traditional herb is mostly valued today for its pleated, fan-shaped foliage and frothy sprays of tiny chartreuse flowers.

Choosing daffodils is time-consuming, since there are so many options. If you think all daffodils are yellow, you have some delightful surprises in store. For instance, my 2-year-old granddaughter is deep into her pink phase, so her top daffodil picks are pink flowered. And ruffled. Seriously. Her first choice was *Narcissus Apricot Whirl*, a dazzling confection with very large, frilly flowers. It's classified as a split corona, meaning that the usual central trumpet-cup is replaced by ruffled coral pink segments gently framed by clean white outer petals. Split corona daffodils are thought to be throwbacks to ancient forms that predate the cupped kinds by millennia. They look fragile but are in fact very sturdy and long-lived. *Apricot Whirl* blooms in April on 14-inch stems and looks lovely interplanted with a swirl of white wind flowers (*Anemone blanda*).

We all fell for a pink-hearted daff called *Narcissus Replete*, an apt description for this double-flowered form. Its outer petals are creamy white while the center is a frothy blend of pale and warm pink segments that look like the Queen Mother's hats. This one flowers from March into May on 15 inch stems and makes long lasting cut flowers. We've also spent a long time considering the butterfly daffodils, split corona types with ruffly inner segments cradled by white or yellow outer petals. We ended up choosing *Dear Love*, crisp white with salmon pink inner ruffles, and a bolder, blazing double called *Le Torch*, incandescent as a fireball in vivid yellows and oranges.

Though many daffodils are bred in Europe, growers in the Pacific Northwest have also produced some splendid ones. Among my favorites is *Mount Hood*, a strong, buttery white trumpet form with a glowing heart of palest gold. It flowers from April into May on 18 inch stems. And if, like me, you love those old-fashioned Poet's *Narcissus* for their sweet scent and dainty blooms, you can still find them today. Sold as *Narcissus poeticus* or *Pheasant Eye narcissus*, they have sparkling white outer petals and small, gleaming yellow cups rimmed in red. Happy planting!

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