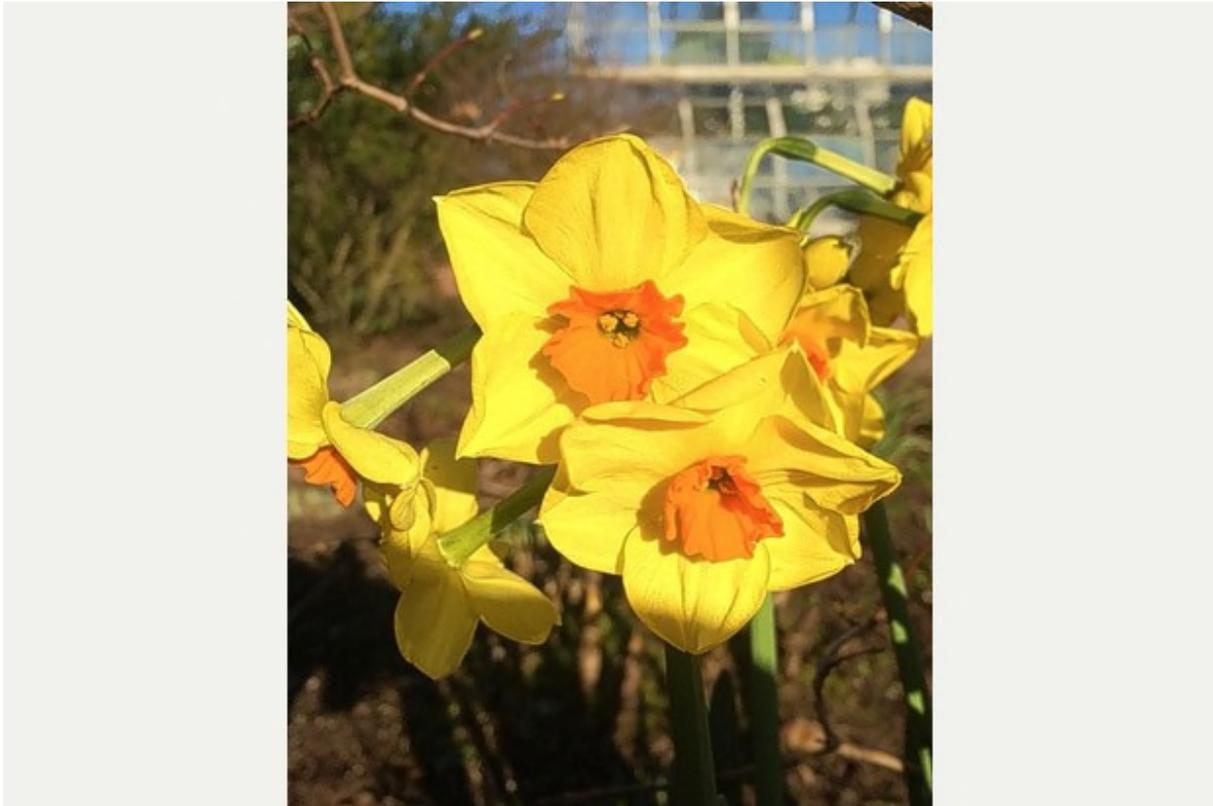


GARDENING with ALI MARSHALL: My top tips for growing daffodils

By [Herald Express](#) | Posted: January 25, 2017



DAFFODILS: You are pretty much guaranteed to get a lovely flower display for the first year

APOLOGIES for my absence last week. Had a slight contretemps with a prawn linguine, which got the upper hand for a day or two.

First time I've ever poisoned myself with my own cooking, despite my rather sinister reputation as an expert on plant poisons!

Anyway I feel much better now and am back at Torre Abbey, busily reorganising my beloved medieval garden and welcoming lots of lovely visitors enjoying the gardens for free. Don't forget to visit!

I promised two weeks ago to talk a little about daffodil cultivation, although you have probably forgotten in the intervening period, but never let it be said I don't keep my promises. So here you go — my top tips! Apart from avoiding my prawn linguine, of course!

1 The golden rule for a good display is to be generous with numbers. Never plant daffodils singly.

Instead plant clumps, preferably of 12 or more and if your budget does not stretch to massed planting a few well placed clumps will be much more dramatic than a thin spread.

If you want to make them look really natural — in grass, for example — then the secret is to throw them out over your planting area rather than try to place them.

When I say throwing I do not mean the kind of throwing one associates with outfield players in a cricket match either. I was once witness to a volunteer who did take the bulbs one by one and launch them with some vigour at an imaginary point somewhere in the far distance. Funny but not terribly effective!

Neither can you throw them at your neighbour or their pesky cat. Just take a handful and gently let them go in a sweeping motion half a metre above the ground so they roll and land naturally and then plant them where they have ended up.

2 Pick the right variety to suit the space. Smaller varieties for the rockery, larger for the border.

Ditto if you are planting in pots. They don't all have to be at the front either.

3 Daffodils like moist, free draining soil (don't most plants!) and plenty of sun.

Partly shaded areas are fine as long as they get at least three hours a day, but full shade is a no-no unless you only like foliage.

As with most bulbs the danger over the longer term is rotting in cold, waterlogged soil so if your soil is heavy and full of clay add some sand to your planting hole right at the start to give your daffodils the best chance of survival.

4 Daffodils are best planted in October, even if the shops start to sell them much earlier, so buy them by all means but store them until planting time. Late planting is possible (leftover stock is often a real bargain) but your flowers will appear later as a result and you will probably find the following year you will have few or even no flowers.

Usually, though, I've found daffodils sort themselves out by the third year. Planting depth varies a little by variety, but around four inches is usual and slightly deeper is always better than shallow, which tends to make the bulbs produce lots of smaller, ineffective bulblets.

Work a little bit of bone meal into the soil below if you think your soil might be short on nutrients.

I'd like to think it goes without saying, since you are reading a garden column, you know they should be planted pointed end up, but I suppose one should never presume.

5 You are pretty much guaranteed to get a lovely flower display for the first year as long as you have planted your bulbs in sunshine.

But there are some things you need to do and not do, however, to ensure they perform equally well in subsequent years.

Bulbs of any sort are storage chests, gathering food and energy in one year in order to flower the next. In the case of daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs this means they can flower very early when there is little competition, even though the sunlight is weak, but they then need as long a period as possible to replenish their store cupboard.

You can help this process by leaving the foliage to die back naturally after flowering so your daffodil can use the increasing sunlight to photosynthesis next year's food.

In other words, do not cut daffodil foliage back for the sake of tidiness, or tie it, which limits its exposure to sun. Let it be.

A little bit of unsightliness for a while is a small price to pay for the joy a cheery daffodil flower will bring to your life next spring.

6 If it's manageable, regular deadheading is also possibly worthwhile — the jury is still out on the matter of deadheading daffodils.

Certainly the great swathes you see in our parks and landscapes come up year after year without any such action being taken, which is fortunate as our parks gardeners have quite enough to do already.

It is true, however, some daffodils, although not all, will try to set seed, and this uses up a great deal of energy which could be better saved to support future flowering.

If you notice a growing swelling at the back of your bloom — the ovary — then you can remove the whole flower when it's dying off, either by cutting it off or by snapping it off by hand.

I was taught by a council gardener to hold the stem with one hand and twist the head off quickly with the other.

Alternatively you could try growing daffodils from seed, a lengthy process but something you can really show off about to fellow horticulturists — eventually.

Up to you, but the world won't end if you don't have the time or the inclination.

7 Feeding is something else which is often recommended in books, but rarely put into practice by most of us, since life quite often gets in the way.

If you do want to feed your daffodils a weak liquid feed in early spring will be appreciated and another after the flowers have died off.

Again, though, the majority of daffodils manage quite happily without this intervention so its not obligatory.

8 Daffodil blindness. If something is really not right with their growing conditions your daffodils will let you know by failing to produce flowers.

I know a fair few people who have had this happen and there are, unfortunately, lots of reasons why this might be, though on the plus side solutions are just as plentiful.

Lack of sunlight, late planting, lack of food, shallow planting, seeding the previous year, drought and overcrowding may or may not be responsible. If it's not immediately obvious what action you need to take then take as many actions as possible.

Feed, water, lift and divide, move to a sunnier spot, and since it's not usually a permanent condition, you should be back to normal the following year.

There are a few pests and diseases associated with daffodils, but they tend to produce more specific symptoms or death rather than blindness so don't assume the worst.

PS Our first daffodils are out in Torre Abbey. How about yours?

Happy gardening.