

GETTING READY FOR THE DAFFODIL SHOW

By Mary Lou Gripshover

Never exhibited in a daffodil show before? Maybe this is the year to take the plunge! Presumably you've planted wonderful daffodils in the fall, and now you want to exhibit them at the flower show this spring. So, what are some of the things you can do in advance?

Mulch your bulbs. If you haven't mulched when you planted, try to get some mulch on the beds prior to bulb growth. You can do it after growth has started, but it's much easier if they're up no more than an inch. You can use fine pine bark, straw, hay, Hershey's cocoa hulls, whatever is convenient for you. Just don't use peat as a mulch. When it rains, the spatters from the peat dirties the flowers, and it's hard to get off. It's much easier to remove ordinary soil spots. The mulch is to keep the flowers clean when it rains. If you mulched in the fall, you don't need to mulch again.

Walk through your garden frequently, looking for possible blooms to take to the show. If stormy weather, hail, etc., is forecast, you'll want to cut the flowers to bring inside. If it's a cultivar that "burns" easily, you will probably want to cut the flower when it is about $\frac{3}{4}$ open. Put the flower in water, in a dark basement, for a few days to let it mature inside. A fine spray mist from time to time would prove helpful. Flowers will grow larger if you can let them mature in growth, but cutting and putting in a dark basement works almost as well. And you don't run the risk of the flower being damaged before the show date.

Some grooming tips: most daffodils should "look you in the eye." So if the head is hanging down, you should try to gently lift it. "Gently" is relative, and you have to practice. Take a flower and push its bloom up, toward the sky. You don't want to push so hard you break the neck, but if you do it right, a bloom that was looking down can be brought up to a pose that is more acceptable to judges. Division 5 and 6 flowers are the exception. They tend to look down. The six petals (and if there are less than that, let the flower home) should preferably be flat, in the same plane. If the petals are hanging over the cup, or "hooded," push the petals back and gently massage them with your fingers. You'll be amazed how much better the



flower looks. The warmth of your hands can do a lot to improve the flower's appearance. You'll hear judges say a flower wasn't "clocked." That means that the upper and lower petals don't line up with the stem in a straight line. So, what to do? Gently, there's that word again, twist the flower head until they line up. This is a small point, but you can see for yourself how much better the flower looks. If you want to enter a vase of 3, choose three blooms that are as close to identical as you can.

OK, your flower looks perfect 10 days before the show date. What now? You're out of luck? No. Cut it and refrigerate it. First clean off any dirt that may be on the flower. You can do this with a Q-tip dipped in water. If the spot is troublesome, put a drop of dishwashing liquid in the water, then gently rub the spot. (If you've mulched, you probably won't have a problem.) There are several schools of thought on refrigeration. Some put the flowers in water, with a plastic bag over them and keep them that way. I prefer to put them, without water, into plastic bags and lay them on my refrigerator shelf. When I take them out to exhibit (the night before), I re-cut the end of the stem and put them in water. Even those that look wilted will probably recover. Doesn't work for miniatures, though. You have to put them in water in the fridge to keep. If you don't try it, you won't have the flower, so what have you got to lose?

Know the names of your daffodils. When you plant bulbs, make some kind of map or planting diagram so that you'll know in the spring what you're looking at. Labels in the garden are good, but do the diagram also, in case labels get moved by children or animals, or by ground freezing and thawing. As you cut flowers, write the name on the stem, using a ball point pen—or something that won't wash off.

The night before the show (or even as the flowers are growing), decide if you want to do any collections. Choose what flowers you want to use, and don't forget to have extras on hand in case you need to make last minute substitutions. This eliminates a lot of stress the morning of the show.

Make out your entry cards in advance. If you have address labels, or a stamp that will print your name and address, you can put them on the cards weeks in advance. Then all you have to do is put the flower name, classification, and class number on the entry card at the last minute, maybe the night before. Anything you can do in advance saves on stress the day of the show.

BUT I DON'T WANT TO EXHIBIT . . .



I just want to enjoy my flowers in the garden, or share them with friends. That's fine, too. So use the time on your daily walks through the garden looking for signs of disease as well as enjoying the flowers. Yellow stripe is something I hope I don't see. Sometimes this can be confused with weather damage. When foliage comes up in late fall or early winter, it can get damaged by the cold weather. Sometimes the tips become yellow. Sometimes the foliage is yellow if it's been under snow cover for a long time. But in yellow stripe virus, the thin yellow lines go from the tips of the foliage down to ground level. Conventional wisdom says to dig the infected bulbs and throw them away—not on your compost pile, but in the trash. Some say that the virus is present in a lot of bulbs, but only appears when the bulbs are otherwise stressed, and doesn't appear every year. And some say certain cultivars are "Typhoid Mary's," carrying the virus but never displaying symptoms. 'Silver Chimes' is said to be one such

cultivar. As with "people" viruses, there is no cure for virus, thus the admonition to throw them away. It's said the virus spreads by aphids who feast on one leaf then another thus spreading the disease, and by the cutting knife when cutting flowers. There's a discussion currently on Daffnet about viruses, with some opting to keep the bulbs, but watch for signs of spreading to other cultivars. Others say dig immediately. So, it's your choice.

It's also a good idea to check the foliage for "spikkels," or bumps along the leaves, a symptom of nematodes. I don't think there's any disagreement on what to do with these bulbs. Get them out as soon as you can! Either treat the soil with something like Basamid or don't plant bulbs back in that location for several years as the nematodes live in the soil. You can save the bulbs, but you'll have to give them hot water treatment before re-planting. You can rig up a "home cooker" by using a hot tray of the type used on buffet tables as the heat source. Then use any container that won't be hurt by heat, half fill with water and bring it to a temperature of 112°. Put the bulbs in the water and maintain a temperature of 112° for 3 hours. The temperature will drop when you put the bulbs in, so you might want to add hot water to get it back up to 112° as quickly as possible. If the water gets too hot, add cold water. I keep the bulbs in the net bags, with the labels, as it's easier to deal with them that way.

Daffodil flies don't show up until later in the season, when it begins to get warm. You might see them flying about or sunning themselves on the flowers or leaves. They look like overgrown house flies, or smallish bumble bees. Get out your butterfly net and amuse the neighbors as you try to catch the flies! I'm not sure which chemicals are currently approved for use on daffodils to control fly, but Dursban, Cygon-E, and Dylox 80 used to be approved. USE EXTREME CARE WITH ALL CHEMICALS, and follow all directions on the label. Raid Wasp and Hornet Killer will kill the fly, but it will also damage any foliage it hits. You can do a lot to control bulb flies if you give your bulbs a good squeeze when you plant. If the bulbs are soft, it's likely there's a fly larva inside. You can either discard the bulb, or try to get the larva out with some sort of hook. Depends, I guess, on how much you value the bulb.