

GARDEN CULTURE OF NARCISSUS IN FLORIDA

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Few bulbs are more at home in Florida gardens than are the polyanthus narcissi. This group, characterized by many small-crowned flowers and broad leaves is quite variable and its botanical status is confused. Suffice it to say that most of the narcissi bearing many small flowers that we grow here are classed as *Narcissus Tazetta*, the Polyanthus *Narcissus*. Exceptionally free from the insects and diseases that frequently spell disaster for many bulbs, these old-time favorites are highly commended.

The variable colors range from the immaculate *Paper White* through various combinations of cream and yellow to deep orange. There are types with single cups and others in which the stamens become petaloid and give a double effect.

Holiday blossoms are produced by early *Paper White*; *Chinese Sacred Lily* comes late in December or in January and this first month of the year usually finds *Grand Monarch*, *The Pearl* and other late polyanthus in flower. From Lake City westward the Campernelle Jonquil, originally found wild in France and Spain is a popular spring-flowering bulb. *King Alfred*, the spectacular large-trumpeted daffodil and even rarer types grow well west of Madison, and though peninsular gardeners may force these temperate species one season, they seldom carry over well in the light sands and warmer winters of central and southern Florida. Poet and pheasant's eye *Narcissus* are usually not successful excepting in the western part of the state.

Narcissus bulbs should be planted between the middle of September and the end of October. For best flowering, select large, round solid, baseball-like bulbs and set them about four inches deep and at intervals four to five times their diameters. Thus they will be in the zone of constant moisture and if you plan to leave them for naturalizing, they will be much better off at this considerable depth and distance. For best results the narcissus planting should be in full sun, as the blooms

will be few, the leaves attenuated when shade-grown. Well drained but fertile beds are needed. All narcissi form blossom buds during the late spring growth, the primordial inflorescences being carried over in storage. For this reason aftercare is most important.

The bulbs should be fed adequately after flowering and then lifted when the leaves turn brown. Store in the garage and discard the foliage and old roots when they separate from the bulbs easily. Leave all the brown protective coat and dust with sulphur to discourage mealy bugs. As with all bulbs be certain that rodents cannot gain admittance to the storage containers.

During September and October tiny roots begin to grow on bulbs in storage, indicating that the rest period has been completed and, given a congenial environment, the roots will elongate rapidly and the tops will begin their annual growth cycle. All types of narcissus that you have had in storage must be cleaned and divided in preparation for planting. Break off the slabs or side bulbs and save the round mother bulbs for setting in the most prominent garden spots, as these will make a notable show in December and January. The slabs can be planted separately in rows in the vegetable or cutting garden where they should assume flowering size in one year.

The preparation of the beds for most kinds of bulbs might be outlined as follows. Choose a spot that is in full sun in which the same kinds of bulbs have not been growing formerly. If the soil is very light, apply about two or three inches of rotted cow manure and turn this under to a depth of some eight or ten inches. If you plan to set your bulbs in drifts as a part of the landscape planting, you will want to make individual planting holes so that the plants will not stand in straight rows. For *Narcissus*, Snow Flakes and hybrid *Amaryllis*, the holes may be a full five inches deep. In the bottom you can drop a small handful of your favorite plant food. This fertilizer should be stirred well and covered with a little earth so that the bulbs do not stand directly upon the salts. Set the bulbs right side up, fill with the regular garden soil and water if you like. No damage will be done if you simply leave the soil unirrigated, but most gardeners feel that they can encourage the plants to establish themselves and grow off to best advantage if they water immediately after planting.

These popular bulbs grow best under a mulch; so after you have finished planting, apply a blanket of leaves some three inches thick over the plot. Walking between the plants will compact the soil, so it is suggested that bulbs be planted in beds or drifts that are narrow enough to be worked from the sides. The mulch should eliminate cultivation, of course, but it will be necessary to pull weeds by hand while they are young and tender.