

Sow There! A little on care and feeding of daffodils in the Sacramento Valley

By [Heather Hacking](#), *Chico Enterprise-Record*



Cheery daffodils are among the easiest bulbs to grow in the Chico area. – Heather Hacking, Enterprise-Record

Daffodils don't just come in humdrum yellow. You can find bulbs that produce flowers with peach-colored centers and many different combinations. – Heather Hacking, Enterprise-Record



I don't quite fit the profile of a frequent Costco shopper. We have a cat but no kids. I'm not the leader of a Girl Scout troop. My house is too small to store 60 rolls of paper towels. Yet, I roam the clean, double-wide aisles of Costco at least once a week.

The behemoth of shopping for folks with big-pantries is located just a few blocks from my work. When I desperately need a break from my desk, I'll flash my membership to card and gather free snack items.

It's like adult trick-or-treating.

With all of these snack visits, I somehow missed the big rack of spring-blooming bulbs.

Like most big-box stores, Costco stocks kayaks in winter and sweaters in mid summer. Right now you can buy Christmas wrap.

While I regularly make fun of this trend, including making loud, cackling noises at the mechanical witches, I appreciate the reminder to buy fall-planted bulbs.

If I time it right, I can buy the bulbs in August, then procrastinate for several months. Bulb-planters can also place bulbs in the ground every two weeks, from now through Thanksgiving, to allow for a staggered bloom.

NOT LOVING LEFTOVERS

Yet, you can't buy a small package of bulbs at Costco. I still have some paperwhites remaining from last year.

Bulbs are resilient. I stored them in the shed, which is relatively cool and dry. When I pinched them this month the bulbs still feel firm.

About 20 years ago I tried to buy a bucket of shriveled naked lady bulbs at a garage sale. They looked like prunes and the lady refused to take my money. I put them in the ground and some of them grew. I divided them over the years, and even planted some in the yard of my neighbors.

That's great, but life is short. If you want fantastic blooms next year, buy fresh bulbs.

CARE OF OLD BULBS

Some people will dig up their bulbs after bloom and store them for the winter. For best results, snip off the flowers as soon as the blooms start to fade. This direct all of the plant's energy back to the bulb, where energy is stored for growth next year. Allow the green leaves to die back naturally, to direct that energy to the bulb. Once the leaves start to turn yellow, stop watering.

When the soil is dry, you can dig up the bulbs.

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Instead of all that, I let the leaves die back then stash my containers filled with bulbs along the side of the house.

A few weeks ago I needed one of those 15-gallon containers to replant a hibiscus plant.

The bulbs still seemed viable, in particular the hyacinth bulbs. I was already dirty and sweaty by this point, so I kept going.

Some of my pots looks almost empty. Others had a few rotten bulbs. Of the four giant pots I investigated, I ended up combining the bulbs into three containers.

I'm glad I spent the time, but it was a lot of work. In the future I think I'll dig down a bit with a trowel and decide whether to simply add a few new bulbs in each container.

Those professional bulb-growers really know what they're doing. They have the perfect soil, automatic drip systems, the right timing and application of fertilizers ...

When we buy those bulbs they are ready to grow and burst.

EXTRA ADVICE

If you love tulips, don't expect them to bloom beautifully more than one year. This area just does not have the right climate. Also, ground and tree rodents love to eat tulip bulbs.

If you're bored with normal, happy, yellow daffodils, mix it up. Some daffodils grow with a peach-colored center, others are white with yellow center, yellow with orange centers or yellow and yellow.

Check with your gardening friends before buying. The best bet is to trade 10 bulbs from your bag for 10 bulbs in their big bag.

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