

### *In Praise of Narcissus Stella Alba*

By the score card, *Narcissus Stella alba* rates very low; in the affections of those who have grown it, it ranks high. Its petals are narrow and far apart, somewhat fluted, sometimes lightly twisted, thin, without much substance; but these narrow, irregular petals give it its starry look, and, when grown in mass in the field, with a little tilt of its head, it has the sprightly grace and joy of a wild thing.

In Bailey's article on *Narcissus* in his *Cyclopedia of Horticulture*, the fine print at the end states: "Stella, one of the star-narcissi of the *N. incomparabilis* group, now represented by *Stella Superba*, about twice the size, with long white spreading segments and cup clear yellow." This modest *Stella alba* can not be *Superba* nor even the *Stella* of old catalogs, also described as "pure white with yellow cup," for this opens a soft Empire Yellow with a slightly deeper crown, and the petals fade to a thin papery white, which must have been the excuse for its name. Our bulbs were bought under the name of *Stella alba* more than forty years ago, but just when and from whom is now lost to memory. Although it must have been well known long ago, no description that fits it has been found in recent book or catalog.

Although after separation they take a little time to colonize, they naturalize easily. Often they appear, quite inexplicably, in distant parts of the garden where they have not been planted. Paper White and *Barrii conspicuus*, planted at the same time under similar conditions, on the other hand, have not increased greatly.

The summer sun bakes the adobe where they grow, but with the first warm spring rains their green points begin to show above ground. Sometimes the heaviest of the wild grasses are pulled to

let the field come through more evenly, which is the extent of their care. They thrive in shade if it is not dense, yet in the San Francisco Bay region they prefer sun. A few hot days in February or March, however, may shorten their blooming period. They keep surprisingly well when picked and scent a room with their delicate perfume.

*Brodiaea laxa* and the white Mariposa lily, *Calochortus venustus*, both native locally, are also naturalizing themselves into these fields and give a later bloom over the old *Narcissus* foliage.

*Stella alba* should be kept apart from the newer, more formal, and very beautifully perfect daffodils, for it is in such a very different class it can not be compared with them. Its appeal lies in its unpretentious simplicity and grace.

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### *Further Notes on Lycoris*

Again, in 1955 as in former years, *Lycoris* has shown the same variations in flowering dates. Among blooming bulbs of plants bought as *Lycoris radiata*, there are four distinct blooming periods with slight overlap between two lots. A fifth lot already established on the place is even now still below ground. The earliest as before is the self-fertile clone already mentioned several times in this journal.

The bulbs bought as *L. radiata alba* from several sources show two distinct plants, neither white. The self-colored clone is a very pale yellow, (paler than *Baryta Yellow* of Ridgway) and might be mistaken for white at a distance. Its fellow clone is pale yellow lightly tinted with pale pink from the base of the segments (Ridgway, Cartridge Buff flushed Pale Congo Pink). In the purchase of one dozen bulbs, eleven were this latter type and one the pale-colored form.