

Selecting Daffodils at Local Garden Stores September, 1997

Have you seen them? They're baaaaack! Daffodil bulbs for planting now are at your local garden store. Some stores have a large selection, others only a few. But in either case, how do you know which bulbs you should add to your garden?

The bulbs which are on sale at garden centers now all came from Holland. Most should perform well, at least the first year. I can tell you what NOT to buy—'King Alfred'. What they're selling is the name, and supplying different yellow trumpet daffodils. The latest statistics from Holland indicate that only .26 hectare out of 1512 hectares devoted to narcissus are planted with 'King Alfred'. A hectare is about 2-1/2 acres. They couldn't possibly be supplying all the 'King Alfred' bulbs you see in the stores. If you REALLY want 'King Alfred', you should probably look for a supplier of heirloom bulbs. Reliable mail order sources sometimes sell "King Alfred-type" daffodils. Also, don't bother buying bone meal. It's such a slow-acting fertilizer that it won't do your bulbs any good. Instead, look for a low-nitrogen all-purpose fertilizer, like 5-10-10, or 3-6-6. But we'll get into planting another time. And of course, you shouldn't buy any bulbs that are soft, or dried shells of bulbs. It's not necessary to buy dozens of the same cultivar, either. Three double-nosed bulbs (or five of a miniature) tucked in here and there in the garden will soon increase to a sizeable clump. But if you DO want to plant a great sweep of daffodils, use only one variety. Don't plant a mixture.



By proper selection, you can have daffodils in bloom over a six- or eight-week period. 'Tete-a-Tete' is a miniature daffodil which blooms early in the season, and 'Baby Moon' (pictured), also a miniature, is one of the very last to bloom. These two daffodils have more than one bloom to the stem, making small bouquets in the garden with only a few bulbs. 'Baby Moon' has the added bonus of a delicious fragrance.

Others that would do well in most areas of the country include ‘Accent’, ‘Salome’, ‘Ice Follies’, and ‘Peeping Tom’, all of which have received the American Daffodil Society Wister Award for an outstanding garden flower. The American-bred ‘Accent’ has a solid pink cup, while ‘Salome’ has a pink cup, bordered in yellow. ‘Ice Follies’ opens as a white and yellow and fades to nearly all white. ‘Peeping Tom’ is an all yellow cyclamineus hybrid, with its yellow petals swept back.

‘Jack Snipe’ is a cyclamineus hybrid in white and yellow which blooms at the beginning of the season. Though not a miniature, its small size makes it a good candidate for the front of the border. ‘Ice Wings’ blooms late in the season, and gives several white pendent bells to each stem. ‘Red Hill’ gives a good show in white and orange/red.

For something a little different, try some of the split corona daffodils. With these daffodils, the cups are split and lay back against the petals, sometimes in a regular manner, and sometimes not. ‘Lemon Beauty’ and ‘Dolly Mollinger’ have white petals, and the cups of ‘Lemon Beauty’ are yellow and white stripes, while in ‘Dolly Mollinger’ the white petals are set off by orange and white stripes. These are sometimes referred to as papillon daffodils. Another type of split-corona daffodils, sometimes referred to as collar daffodils, is ‘Cassata,’ in all white.



Two miniatures available locally are *N. bulbocodium* (pictured), sometimes called the Petticoat Daffodil, and ‘Minnow’. *N. bulbocodium* is a species, or wild, daffodil, and requires special treatment to succeed over time. (I’ve seen fields of them being grown in Holland, so there’s no need to be concerned about their being “collected” bulbs.) They like a lot of water during their growing season, and then they want to be completely dry over the summer. If you can provide those conditions, they should be happy with you. ‘Minnow’ has a tendency to make more leaves and bulbs than flowers, but the three or four blooms to a stem are lovely when they come.

Two other cultivars which were bred in the U.S. are now making their way into Dutch commercial channels. ‘Pipit’ is a “reverse bicolor” jonquil hybrid. That means the cup is white and the petals yellow, instead of the

other way around. Reverse bicolors often open all yellow, then the cups fade as the blooms mature. Being a jonquil hybrid, 'Pipit' has several blooms to the stem. This one gets tall, and would be lovely planted at the back of the border. 'Quail' is all yellow, and not as tall as 'Pipit'. Both would add something different to your spring garden.

To end the season, try the Pheasant Eye narcissus. This is really *N. poeticus recurvus*, and is a lovely end to the daffodil season. You'll enjoy its fragrance while you're planting annuals.