

## SHOWTIME, AND OTHER RITES OF SPRING March, 1998

Spring is the season all daffodil lovers wait for; and for many, participation in a daffodil show is a rite of spring. Shows have several purposes. Organizers use a show as the perfect opportunity to educate people about the latest advances in their particular flower. While individual exhibitors would probably say that's why they exhibit, they are also pleased if they can show their well-grown specimens and win prizes. As in most endeavors, it's not the prize that's important, it's the winning!

Even if you say you'd never want to enter a flower show, you really ought to attend a specialist society show sometime. You'll be amazed at the number of different cultivars on display. You can make notes of which flowers you'd like to add to your garden. A show is much better than making selections from a catalog. In a catalog, you have to depend on the prose of whoever wrote the catalog. In a show, you can see what the bloom will look like in your area. That's particularly important with daffodils, as the color is affected by climate. A catalog may say something has a deep red cup, when in your garden it may only be a pale orange, or red only near the rim. Reputable catalogs aren't trying to fool you; they describe the flower as it grows in their climate.

Check out the American Daffodil Society home page (see links) for the list of 1998 shows. If there's one in your area, try to attend. I think you'll be surprised at the range of colors and shapes of modern daffodils. Some shows even have commercial exhibits of blooms flown in from growers. Lots of times those flowers are still under number, but they are the blooms of the future. And the size and color will knock your socks off! And if you do decide to attend, why not take some of your best blooms with you? Pick your very best ones, clean off all the dirt, and take them with you. You'll find people at the show willing to help you enter your blooms. Who knows, you might win a ribbon, and get really hooked on daffodils!

Going through all the catalogs preparing the "wish list" of new daffodils is another rite of spring. If you haven't ordered from specialist daffodil growers before, this is the time of year to write for their catalogs. You can find a complete list of them on the ADS home page for that, too. The Mitsch and Duncan catalogs are two of my favorites, not only because I like their bulbs, but the catalogs have lots of color photos with realistic color—color as it is in Oregon and Northern Ireland. If you send for any specialist catalogs, you'll probably be surprised by some of the costs per bulb. But remember the amount of time required to develop a new daffodil: five years from seed to first bloom, three or four years to evaluate it, and maybe six or seven more years before there are a dozen bulbs available for sale. So we're talking about twenty years work before a new introduction ever makes it into a catalog. The law of supply and demand takes care of prices: as the supply increases, the price comes down. If you go to a show, you may be persuaded to join a local daffodil club. These clubs often have bulb sales and exchanges and you can add some nice things to your collection.

Another rite of spring is recording bloom dates. Do you keep a garden journal? It doesn't have to be a fancy one. I use a simple 3-ring notebook, and record the date of first bloom of the different cultivars of daffodils. I also record other flowers blooming at the same time. That way I can plan "pictures" in my garden. Pictures in catalogs are often staged with pot-grown plants. By knowing what blooms with what in MY garden, I can create pictures.

With the bloom dates recorded, I can also make use of the microclimates in my garden. If I want even earlier blooms, I can plant an early-blooming cultivar in the area of my garden that warms up first. We can all find that spot. It's where the snow melts first. Or if I need a later-blooming flower for a certain show date, I can plant it in that warm microclimate. Conversely, I can plant some of my earliest miniatures in a cold spot to prolong the miniature daffodil season. We can all use these little tricks in our gardens. Sometimes it's all right to fool Mother Nature.