

GROWING DAFFODILS IN POTS

October, 1998

Have you ever thought it might be nice to have a pot of daffodils to put on your front porch or patio next spring? Or do you want to force some bulbs to bloom early, so that you have them BEFORE spring? Or maybe you want to enter a pot of blooms in a show like the Philadelphia Flower Show. Planting bulbs in pots can solve all those problems.

You can buy bulbs especially for planting in pots, or if you've dug some from your garden and have too many to replant, why not try some in pots. But if you do this, remember to choose the fattest rounds to put in pots. Don't put your tiniest offshoots in pots—you may not get any blooms!

What kind of pots should you use? Plastic pots have the advantage of not drying out as rapidly as clay pots. They are easier to clean and lighter in weight as well as less expensive. However, many prefer clay bulb pans or pots. Bulbs grow equally well in either. Six- to eight-inch pots are recommended for daffodils, although you can use any suitable size to accommodate the number of bulbs you have. But remember, big pots of soil can be very heavy. The pots should be scrubbed clean before use, and clay pots soaked for several hours to fill pores. A good potting mixture consists of one part good garden soil, one part sand, and one part peat moss. If you're only planting a few in pots, you can buy potting soil from the garden center. It's not necessary to add fertilizer to the soil mix, as the bulbs will probably not be suitable for potting again. Plant them in your garden and let them recover.

Planting can take place any time from mid-September to December, depending on the desired date of flowering, and the type of storage used. As a general rule, for late flowering, plant late; and for early flowering, plant early. Daffodil bulbs need at least thirteen weeks of cold treatment to bloom, and fifteen weeks are preferred. After this cold period, the pots can be brought into a warmer area, approximately 60°, in direct sunlight, where they should bloom in about 3–4 weeks. If you want bloom for a specific time, count backwards from the required date to determine your planting time. If you want bloom for March 1, you need to plant by November 1 AT THE LATEST.

Put some broken crockery or rocks over drainage holes and cover with a little sphagnum moss, pebbles, or other coarse material before adding potting soil. Half fill the pot with soil, place the bulbs, then fill the pot with soil. Settle the soil well around the bulbs by jarring the pot sharply and lightly pressing soil with fingers. The soil under the bulbs should be loose so that good rooting can take place quickly. The tips of the bulbs should just be showing above the soil line. If you want really spectacular pots, plant a double layer of bulbs in the pot. Your friends will be amazed! Label each pot with the name of the cultivar, date of planting, and date to be placed in the house.

After planting, water the pots thoroughly, and drain them. Then you have several options for providing the cold period. If you have a spare refrigerator, you can store them

there. Inserted inside a plastic bag, they probably won't require additional water until you bring them out into the light. If you don't have a refrigerator, or aren't particular about the timing of bloom, you can sink the pots in a coldframe; or you can prepare a trench and sink the pots in it. Cover it with sand for easier removal, followed by leaves and/or straw. If you have a basement with window wells, you can put the pots there, and cover the well with some sort of protection. If it gets really cold, you can let the basement window open just a bit to prevent freezing the pots. And of course, you can store the pots in a cool spot in the cellar, garage, porch, or greenhouse, and water as needed. Be sure, though, that you do not let the pots on top of the ground if you live where winter temperatures go below freezing. While bulbs can survive freezing underground, a frozen pot on top of the ground is NOT conducive to growing bulbs!

After the bulbs have had their 13-15 weeks in cold storage, you can bring the pots into warmer temperatures and direct sunlight. They should flower in about 3-4 weeks. Once the flowers begin to open, remove them from direct sunlight. The flowers will last longer. And if you put them in a cool room at night, you can prolong the blooming period as well.

So why not try a few pots of bulbs this year? Be the first in your neighborhood to welcome spring!