

October in the Daffodil Garden

October, 1999

October in the daffodil garden could find me doing many things. By now, the new bulbs I ordered from specialist growers have arrived, and I've been relishing the gratis bulbs they've also sent. Most specialist growers send along something extra, by way of a "thank you" to their customers.

If you're making a new garden, be sure to dig the soil deeply, and incorporate any amendments that may be necessary: humus for clay soils; gypsum if you like, though some say it doesn't help; some fertilizer low in nitrogen, as daffodils don't want a lot of nitrogen. Avoid fresh manures, as they encourage bulbs to rot. Also, avoid bone meal. It doesn't do anything for your bulbs. Mix all this thoroughly before planting, and be sure the bulbs don't sit directly on fertilizer. While daffodils aren't fussy, like all plants, the better conditions you give them, the better they will do for you.

You can plant daffodils any time until the ground freezes, but it's a good idea to plant them once the ground cools so that they can get good root growth made before the soil freezes. While you're re-planting the bulbs you dug, along with the new ones, be sure to give each bulb a good squeeze, and if it's soft, discard it. It may have a bulb fly larva in it, or it may have rotted while it was out of the ground. And of course, never buy a soft bulb. Once the bulbs are planted, cover the area with mulch. Mulch accomplishes several things: it keeps the soil temperature more even, keeping it warmer in winter and cooler in summer; it makes the beds look nice; and it will keep your flowers clean next spring when it rains. I use a fine pine bark; some people use pine needles. Use whatever is handy in your area. Just don't use peat moss as a mulch. It crusts, making it hard for the rain to penetrate, and it does nothing to keep your flowers clean in the spring. Now all you have to do this fall is rake up the leaves. Leaves make great compost. If you can run them through a shredder first, they'll make compost sooner. Or pile them up and run the lawnmower over them, to chop them up a bit. Instant shredder! I'm planning to use the chopped leaves as a mulch at the very back of my garden, where it adjoins the woods behind us.

If you haven't ordered bulbs by mail, why not check out what's available locally and add a few things to your garden. I bought the miniature, 'Baby Moon', locally this year. It has three or four blooms per stem, blooms very late, and is very fragrant. My previous stock was not doing well. It's inexpensive, and easy to replace. Others I noted were the smallish 'Jack Snipe' and 'Salome'. While you're at the garden store, you might want to add some early crocus or other small bulbs to go in your garden, too.

On rainy days, of which we've had very few, I check out "Daffnet" to see what's doing in other parts of the world. "Daffnet" is a list server run by The American Daffodil Society. Check out their website at <http://www.mc.edu/~adswww/>

Anyone can participate, member or not. Just follow the directions. During the Fall, “Daffnetters” from down under report on their show activity. The Tasmanian Daffodil Council has a great website with photos of their winning flowers. You can find it at <http://www.tasblooms.com/tdc/index.htm>

And while you’re checking websites, check out the site of the Northern California Daffodil Society (<http://www.daffodil.org>) with the photos of their show held in a California winery. And the prizes were bottles of wine! Makes me wish I lived in California! These people know how to enjoy their daffodils! I’m sure the non-winners enjoyed lots of wine, too. That’s the best thing about daffodils—the people you meet along the way. Sure, the flowers are nice, but they bloom a short time, then go away until next year. But the people are there all year long.