

Judging Daffodils March, 2000

As I write this at the end of February, a few daffodils have opened outside the coldframe. About ten days of above normal temperatures have the plants well advanced. This warm-weather break is not unusual in this area of Zone 5 in February, but gardeners tend to worry what will happen when the inevitable cold returns. The daffodils will probably be all right as long as the temperature doesn't go below 18-20 degrees. 'Wee Bee', a miniature yellow trumpet daffodil takes the honors as the first daffodil open this year, and it was closely followed by 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation'. This last hasn't bloomed for some years, as the buds are usually frozen in January.

In other parts of the country, spring has already arrived, and daffodil shows are being held. Why should you go to a daffodil show, or any flower show for that matter? It's a good opportunity to see the wide variety of plants which grow in your area as well as talk to other gardeners who have a passion for a particular plant. These gardeners are a wonderful source of information about the culture of their particular plant, and they can tell you where you can get some of the more unusual specimens on display. And you might as well be a bit adventurous and take along some of your flowers to enter. You will usually find people are very helpful to newcomers and will help you get your flowers entered. You won't need any leaves for U.S. shows; in fact, they're not allowed, as the plant needs the leaves to make next year's bloom.

So, what should you know about showing your flowers? And how do they decide which flowers win the awards? First of all, it helps to know the name of your flower. In some shows, un-named flowers are not allowed, but the people helping with entries will try to help you with the name.

Cut your flowers with as long a stem as you can. A nice strong stem. You want your flower to stand up nice and tall, so it says to the judges, "Look at me!" And you should always clean your flowers before taking them to a show. You wouldn't go to a party in your grubby clothes, with a dirty face, would you? So, don't take dirty flowers to a show. You can clean the blooms with a Q-tip moistened with water. Gently wash the dirt off the flowers. Stubborn spots can sometimes be removed by adding just a drop or two of dishwashing liquid to a half-cup of water, and using that water for cleaning the blooms.

Sometimes daffodils can get sunburned. This is especially true of red-cupped cultivars. So you might want to cut red-cupped flowers just after they have opened, and bring them inside for several days to open the rest of the way. By putting the blooms in water in the cool basement, the bloom can mature without danger of being sunburned. What does sunburn look like? Well, the top of the cup could be bleached out, or the edges of the cup could be hard and dry.

Sometimes, though, high winds can dry the cup edges, so I guess you'd call that windburn.

You want the flower you enter to be nice and fresh. You don't want it to die before the judges get there! And some shows last for two days, so you want your flower to make you proud over the duration of the show. You don't want to get to the show on the second day and be confronted with a dead bloom. And when you're entering your flower, make sure the vase the committee supplied is full of water. You don't want the flower to die because all the water is gone.

The bloom should have good color. If it's supposed to be pink and white, then cut one that has developed the pink tones. Remember, some flowers take a day or two to develop the proper color. Judges look for nice clear color, with no streaks or color breaking. Select a bloom that has no tears, nicks, or notches in the petals. Sometimes as the flower opens, the petals "catch" in the cup, resulting in a "mitten thumb" in the petals. The judge would take off points for that, so examine the flower closely. Don't forget to look inside the cup. Sometimes spiders weave little webs inside, or some pollen has fallen from the anthers. Blowing into the cup usually gets rid of the pollen, and the Q-tip or a very fine artist's brush can eliminate the spider web. And do NOT remove the dry sheath or spathe (which covered the bloom before it opened). That's part of the flower and belongs there.

So why not visit a daffodil show near you. You'll find a list on the American Daffodil Society home page at <http://www.mc.edu/~adswww/>. I guarantee you'll see lots of beautiful flowers, and meet some nice people. You might even think about joining their local group. They usually have bulb exchanges or sales for members, and you can get some fine bulbs that way. Try it, you may find you like it!