

Summer Daffodil Chores

August, 2000

I dug quite a few of my daffodils in June because they had been down for eight years and were giving fewer blooms. I really don't like to let them down that long, but some other family matters got in the way the last two years. So, while I was at it, I decided to rejuvenate the entire area. After the daffodils were dug, I lifted all the perennials. Then I ordered some "fine pine bark" mulch which I spread about two to three inches thick on top of the ground. Compost would have been better, but you use whatever is available. I added some gypsum and something I've never used before, Schultz Clay Soil Conditioner. I hired a neighbor boy to rototill the area, and then replanted the perennials. I'll add fertilizer in the fall when I replant the daffodils. It was a big job, but I hope the plants will do better now. Those the deer haven't eaten, that is. But that's another story.



Two year-old bulblets, smaller than my little finger, were dumped out of the seed pots and planted in the open where they should bloom in another 3-5 years. If the bulblets are still really small, from maybe a cross involving miniatures, they go back into pots and into the coldframe for another year or two.

The bulbs have been drying in my garage, and last week I began cleaning my daffodil bulbs. The bulbs are interesting. Some of the bulbs are clear indicators of the type flower. Bulbs of tazetta hybrids are usually shiny brown, and round and smooth. I've heard some people describe them as "round and shiny as cannon balls." Bulbs of poeticus hybrids are long and skinny. And of course you get the full range of bulb sizes: triple nosed, double nosed, rounds, and offsets. You can probably count on blooms next year from the triples, doubles and large rounds. Offsets will take a year or two to grow to blooming size again.



My neighbor asked why I was doing all this cleaning, and the answer is that it gives me a perfect opportunity to inspect my bulbs. I rub the soil off, pull off the dry roots, and give the bulbs a good squeeze. If the bulb is soft, throw it away. It may have basal rot, or the narcissus fly may have decided it liked your daffodils, too, and laid its eggs in your most favorite bulb. Sometimes you can see a hole where the larva has entered the bulb. It may be pinhole size, and hard to see, or larger. The literature says the larva enters from the basal plate, but it can

also enter on the side of the bulb. While I don't have photographic evidence to support me, I think they can also enter from the neck of the bulb, because sometimes when I've cut open a soft bulb, the larva is inside, but I can find no entry point. If this happens with an expensive bulb, or the only bulb of a cultivar, you can sometimes salvage the bulb. Take a nail or something similar and insert it into the entrance hole and dig around carefully a little. You can usually get the grub out. It's about the size of the "roly poly" bugs (as my daughter called them



when she was small). Some people say a crochet hook is good for this, but since I don't crochet, I use a nail. There will be a lot of detritus inside the bulb, and you will probably have to soak the bulb in a strong fungicide to prevent further rot inside. If you have lots of bulbs, I wouldn't bother with this, just throw the bulb away—and not on your compost pile either! In the trash!! As I replant the bulbs in September and October, I'll give the bulbs another squeeze, in case I missed any soft bulbs the first time through.

As I clean, I make a record of the number of bulbs of each size, so that I'll know which I can share for any public planting my local daffodil group undertakes. And I'll also know how many bulbs I plant back, so that next time I dig, I'll know about how many bulbs to expect.

The cleaned bulbs are spread out on my garage floor in net bags, where they spend the summer. The car has to fend for itself outside! Some of my friends handle their bulbs differently. Some spray them with the hose when they're first dug to get the mud off and bring them inside where it's air conditioned. That works for them. But I've been doing it this way for years, and it works for me. Just whatever you do, be sure you don't put the bulbs in big piles. That's a sure invitation for trouble.