

Wild Daffodils

February, 2001

Wild daffodils. What exactly are wild daffodils? Technically, they're species daffodils, and those hybrids that occur in nature. Most of those we grow in our gardens are daffodil hybrids, which have been developed over the years. And with all the efforts at conserving plant material around the world, not many species daffodils have been available in the trade. But I have seen species daffodils offered for sale in some catalogs recently, so I thought we might talk about the best way to grow them.

First, the United States has no wild daffodils. Most, but not all, are natives of Spain and Portugal. You might find daffodils growing in the United States in fields, maybe around deserted homesteads, particularly in the South. But these had been planted by someone at some point in time. Now, you might find a few species daffodils among them, like *N. jonquilla* and *N. x medioluteus*. *N. x medioluteus* is better known by its common name, "Twin Sisters" or *N. x biflorus*. These have thrived in the South.



Let's start with the most widely available, *N. bulbocodium*, sometimes referred to as hoop petticoats. These plants in nature grow in the mountains, and bloom with the snow melt. I've seen them growing and blooming in standing water in early spring. But after the snow melts, the area is dry. So, to get repeat bloom and keep them thriving, plant them where they get lots of water early in the spring.

Then try to keep them completely dry over the summer. They want a good summer baking. Foliage often comes up in late autumn or in an early winter warm spell, and can then be killed when winter weather returns. I've not found it particular about either acid or alkaline soil.

The sweetly scented, yellow *N. jonquilla* is available. Though in the wild it grows in damp meadows and along river banks, it doesn't seem to be particular about the soil. It makes a good garden plant, especially on alkaline soils. It will do better in the South as the foliage tends to come up in one of those mid-winter warm spells.

Little *N. triandrus*, the lovely little 'Angel's Tears,' has appeared in a couple of catalogs. I would be very suspicious if I saw them priced at 10 for \$\$\$. I ordered one year from a catalog that priced them that way, even by the 100s. I got *N. bulbocodium* instead. The triandrus species are a bit more particular in their soil requirements. They grow in acid soil, on granite outcroppings, so I mix granite grit, sold for poultry, in with the soil, sometimes even placing the bulb directly on the granite grit. The best flowers I've ever had were grown under the eaves of my house, where they got very little water. In the wild, *N. rupicola* can often be found growing nearby, so plant them in similar soil conditions.



I was delighted to find *N. cyclamineus* in two catalogs this year. This little charmer, with the severely swept-back petals, likes a semi-shady dampish place in the garden. It is not long-lived, so if you do buy a few bulbs, be sure to pollinate the blooms with the hope of getting seed to grow on. It grows naturally in damp, heavy soil, and in cultivation prefers a somewhat acid soil.

Since some of these plants require protection in my climate, I grow them in pots and sink the pots in my coldframe. They should also do well in a cold greenhouse. My potting mix is a mixture of roughly equal parts of Peters Professional Potting Mix (mostly peat-like material), Schultz Clay Soil Conditioner (or turfus) for good drainage, and potting soil. For those plants that like granite, I add an equal amount of granite grit. A little low-nitrogen fertilizer gets added in as well. Slow release fertilizer is good. Those that want a good summer baking are removed from the coldframe for the summer and not watered.



All those I've mentioned above, except *N. x medioluteus*, are miniature in size, but you can also get standard sized species. *N. obvallaris*, the Tenby Daffodil of Great Britain, is available. This is a golden yellow flower with a cup just a little too short to be called a trumpet daffodil. It has broad petals, the flower is held on a sturdy stem and makes a good garden plant.

If you're really interested in wild daffodils, then you really should get John Blanchard's book, *Narcissus, A Guide to Wild Daffodils*. It is absolutely the best book on the subject. It's

available from The American Daffodil Society. Contact the Executive Director at Nliggett@compuserve.com for details.

A Few Sources: Some grow their bulbs from seed. I have not ordered from all of them.

Arrowhead Alpines, P. O. Box 857, Fowlerville, MI 48836;
<http://www.arrowheadalpines.com>

Broadleigh Gardens, Bishops Hull, Taunton, Somerset TA4 1AE, UK; does not export to U.S.

Brent and Becky's Bulbs, 7463 Heath Trail, Gloucester, VA 23061;
www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com

Cherry Creek Daffodils, 21700 S. W. Chapman Rd., Sherwood, OR 97140-8608;
<http://home.europa.com/~stevev/main.html>

Paul Christian Bulbs; <http://rareplants.co.uk>

Glenbrook Bulb Farm, 28 Russell Road, Claremont, Tasmania 7011, Australia

Mitsch Daffodils, P.O. Box 218, Hubbard, OR 97032; www.webster.com/havens/mitsch/

Monocot Nursery, "Jacklands," Jacklands Bridge, Tickenham, Clevedon, North Somerset BS21 6SG, UK

Nancy R. Wilson, 6525 Briceland-Thorn Rd., Garberville, CA 95542; email nwilson@asis.com