

Time to get those daffodil bulbs! September, 2001

This may be my second favorite time of year. Blooming season, in the spring, is best of course. But when those little boxes of bulbs begin appearing in the mail, well, that has to rate right up there near the top! And the coming of September means just that. If you placed any mail orders for bulbs, they will soon begin arriving. And it's always fun to see what "goodies" the grower has included as a little gift. Most all the specialist growers tuck in some little extra, as a way to say "thank you for your business."

When the boxes arrive, be sure to open them and give the bulbs some air. Spread them out a little. While you're at it, give each bulb a little squeeze, to make sure it's nice and firm. Check to see if there are any signs of mold. It's rare to find problems, but if you do find any, send a polite note to the grower, and you'll either get another bulb, or a refund. (I'm talking about specialist growers here, those who grow their own bulbs. A mass marketer, who probably doesn't grow the bulbs, may not have replacements.) And if you're not going to plant them right away, store them in a cool, dry place until planting time. It's best to wait until the soil has cooled a bit before planting, but you want to plant before the ground freezes so the bulbs can make good root growth before winter. In my area of Ohio, early October is usually a good time; further south, late October or early November would be better.

If you didn't order from mail order sources, it's almost too late now, though some growers have "late lists." Check the growers' list on the ADS website, www.daffodilusa.org, and email some of the growers and ask. But don't delay!

Of course, you can always get bulbs at your local garden stores in the fall. The selection won't be as wide, and the cultivars won't be as new, but there are still some good bulbs being offered. I checked at a couple stores locally and found the early, smallish 'Jetfire'. This is a nice little red and yellow cyclamineus hybrid. It would make a cheery greeting early in daffodil season. Plant it where you can see it from your window, or by your sidewalk, so you can see it without getting your feet wet. The miniature 'Tete-a-Tete' is also widely available. You can buy this in bloom at the grocery next February, or you can buy bulbs now and plant your own pots as well as plant it in the garden. This little yellow flower usually has two blooms on a stem, though it sometimes comes single, and sometimes with three. In any of its guises, it's a charming flower. 'Salome', in white and pink, and 'Ice Follies', which opens white and yellow and fades to white and cream, are both winners of the American Daffodil Society Wister Award, which is given to flowers which should do well in gardens all across the United States. 'Salome' has the added benefit of being smooth enough for showing as well. In fact, a collection of Wister winners would look great in any garden. Brent Heath, of Brent and Becky's Bulbs, offers eight of the twelve winners: 'Ceylon', 'Ice

Follies', 'Intrigue', 'Monal', 'Salome', 'Stratosphere', 'Sweetness', and 'Tripartite'. The others are 'Accent', 'Golden Aura', 'Peeping Tom', and 'Rapture'.

I also noticed that 'Golden Ducat' was available locally. This is an all yellow double daffodil, but unfortunately it has a habit of "blasting," that is the buds dry up instead of opening. At least this has been the case wherever I have grown it. Doubles are a bit persnickety, and unless you live in an area where you KNOW that doubles do well, you may not want to plant it.

Look for bulbs of some of the smaller, fragrant daffodils. 'Pipit' and 'Quail' are both jonquil hybrids with some of the fragrance, but not so much as to be overpowering. Both have long-lasting blooms that stand well above the foliage. And if you can find 'Sir Winston Churchill' or 'Geranium', be sure to tuck a few near the sidewalk or paths. You'll enjoy the fragrance late in daffodil season.

If you want an all yellow daffodil that will last in your garden for years, look for 'Carlton'. This is a large cupped daffodil, not a trumpet daffodil, but it will provide a lovely two-toned yellow in your garden. Brent Heath says in his catalog that it is "one of the best perennializers especially in the South."

So why not add a few bulbs of varieties that are new to you? You'll be glad you did.