

Planting Daffodils

October, 2001

OK, so you've got all your bulbs now, either from mail order sources, or purchased locally, and you want to plant them. You can plant until the ground freezes, and it's better to wait until the soil has cooled. In Ohio, where I live, I can plant any time now. If you live where it's warmer, wait awhile yet. I was recently asked whether bulbs could be held over until next year to plant. Unexpected problems have come up, and moving into a new home must be delayed. But the answer is no, you should not try holding the bulbs out of the ground for a year. Most would either dry up or rot. If you have bulbs that you think you can't get into the ground this year, see if you can plant at a friend's home, or plant in pots and keep the pots in an area where they won't freeze. A garage can work, if you protect the pots in the coldest weather.

Daffodils are not particular about soil type, and will grow in acid or alkaline soils, heavy clay or sandy. They will grow in light shade, but do better in full sun. Deep shade keeps them from blooming after the first year or two. Daffodils are some of the easiest flowers to grow. I've heard some people jokingly say they just dig a hole, drop in the bulb, cover with soil, and then stomp it down! And this is really all it takes. But as with any plant, the better you prepare the soil, the better the flowers will be, and the happier your plant will be.

Because I had a nematode problem in the area in which I am planting, I had my soil chemically sterilized this summer. Because of that, the ground was rototilled this summer, and so the soil is still loose enough that extensive soil preparation will not be required. Ideally, you should prepare the planting area as deeply as you can—the deeper the better, as that will give your bulbs good soil for the root run. If this is a new bed, add any organic materials (compost, fine pine bark, etc.) as needed (I've sworn off mushroom compost, though), and a complete, low nitrogen fertilizer (3-6-6 or 5-10-10 (about 1/4 cup per square foot). Be sure the fertilizer does not come in direct contact with the bulbs. NEVER use fresh manure. Bonemeal is not recommended—in fact its use is discouraged. Since mine is not a new bed, I'll just dig deep enough to plant the bulbs, about six inches. This is about 2-1/2 times the height of the bulb.

I have quite a few miniatures to plant also, and these will go into plastic berry baskets which will be sunk into the ground. As these are smaller bulbs, they don't get as deeply planted. Since I can get winter temperatures of 0°F or below, I plant them about 3-4 inches deep. The berry baskets make it easy to locate the bulbs whenever I decide to dig them. Since most miniatures like very good drainage, I bought some Schultz Clay Soil Conditioner. A similar product called Turfus (I think) is frequently used in potting mixes used in greenhouses. This is a ceramic product which I will mix liberally into the soil. If you don't want to incorporate the fertilizer into the soil, you can broadcast it over the top of the bed

after covering the bulbs, but before mulching. Label the bulbs and make a map of your planting, in case either children or animals make off with the labels.

After planting, cover the beds with mulch. Mulch serves many purposes. It helps keep down weeds. (If you use a pre-emergent herbicide in your gardens, Preen is safe to use on daffodils.) Mulch also keeps the flowers clean and helps keep the soil cool in the summer. Shredded bark and pine straw are good mulches; peat moss is not a good mulch, as it tends to make a hard crust, making it difficult for water to penetrate.

If it doesn't rain, give your bulbs a good soaking, to get the root growth started. And that's it. You see, daffodils really are easy! Sit back, relax, and wait for all those beautiful blooms next spring.