

Double daffodils

November, 2001

Someone recently asked to borrow some slides of daffodils from me for a program on spring bulbs they were doing, but they wanted something “different,” not the usual yellow trumpet daffodils. Specifically, I was asked for slides of doubles or split coronas, so that people could see a bit of the variety available in daffodils.

A double daffodil, you say? What’s a double daffodil? Well, the official classification considers anything a double if any of the parts are double. So it could have a double perianth, with a single cup; or it could have a single, normal perianth with the doubling confined to the cup or trumpet. Some examples of this type would be ‘Exotic Beauty’ and ‘Petit Four’. Both of these have a normal white perianth, with a trumpet filled with perianth segments of pink and white.



There are also double daffodils that come with more than one bloom per stem, like the popular white ‘Cheerfulness’ (pictured) and its counterpart, ‘Yellow Cheerfulness’. These blooms originated as sports of tazetta daffodils, and the tazetta fragrance carries through into these flowers. There is also one called ‘Bridal Crown’ which is very similar to ‘Cheerfulness’.

Double daffodils are very popular these days, but that wasn’t always the case. Most doubles were sterile, or nearly so, so breeders were unable to improve upon the form or color. But in the 1940s, a flower appeared in the fields of J. Lionel Richardson in Ireland which proved to be fertile. This flower was ‘Falaise’, and it became the cornerstone of modern double daffodils.

Some of the first flowers raised by Richardson from ‘Falaise’ were named for places in the South Pacific: ‘Tonga’ (pictured), ‘Hawaii’, and ‘Tahiti’, all of which are yellow and orange, and the all yellow ‘Fiji’. These were all bred from ‘Falaise’ x ‘Ceylon’.

Richardson continued with his line of flowers from ‘Falaise’. By using ‘Gay Time’, a child of ‘Falaise’, he raised both ‘Gay Challenger’ and ‘Gay Kybo’. Both are classified as white and orange flowers, but ‘Gay Challenger’ gets its much whiter perianth from its father, ‘Arbar’, while ‘Gay Kybo’ is bred from ‘Rameses’.



Other breeders soon began producing double daffodils as well, and now doubles are available in the full range of colors. Brian Duncan, in Northern Ireland, bred a series of pink and white doubles which he named after famous hotels: 'Waldorf Astoria', 'Dorchester', 'Claridges', 'Regent Palace', 'Post House', and 'Grosvenor', among others.



There is now even a reverse bicolor double daffodil of sorts. 'Doubleday' (pictured), bred by John Blanchard in England, has both perianth and corona segments of yellow striped ever so subtly with white, giving the flower an overall lemon color.

Grant E. Mitsch, in Oregon, has also contributed to the modern double daffodils. His 'Rose Garden' and 'Independence Day' in white and red, and the all white 'Ice Diamond' are great-great grandchildren of 'Falaise'. Others from Mitsch include the all yellow 'Moonflight' and the white and pink 'Night Music'.

Currently double sports of the popular 'Ice Follies' have been appearing in the trade. There are about a half dozen, including 'Obdam' and 'Ice King'. I've not grown these, but coming from 'Ice Follies', I would expect them to be excellent growers.

There is another type of double daffodil which is smaller than those mentioned above, yet has only one bloom per stem. These are the doubles bred from various poeticus daffodils. These usually bloom late in the season and carry the poeticus fragrance. Some examples are 'Sweet Music', 'Adoration', and 'Happy Ending' (pictured).



Growing doubles can present several problems. Some cultivars have weak stems which fail to hold the bloom upright in rainy weather. But the biggest problem with doubles is their tendency to "blast" instead of opening properly. The bud forms, and then growth just stops, and the bud never opens. If you squeeze the bud, it will be soft. Sometimes the flower opens part way, with lots of green on the back which causes deformity in the flower. I wish I could tell you what causes this. The best guess seems to be that it is climate dependent. If you have a cool, damp spring, then your doubles will probably open properly. When you get cool weather, then a spell of hot weather, and back to cool, etc., that's when doubles seem to give more problems.

Why not try a few double daffodils in your garden? If your climate is right for them, or when you have that "perfect" spring, the doubles are spectacular.