

Time to Order Those Bulbs

June, 2002

Well, that ugly daffodil foliage is about ready to be pulled—you haven't tied the leaves in nice neat little bundles have you? I didn't think so . . .you know better than that! So as you pull away the old foliage, you can make note of where you can add a few more bulbs for next year. It helps if you put a label or some kind of marker in the garden so you'll know where to dig when the bulbs arrive in the fall.

Sure, you can wait and buy your bulbs at local garden stores in the fall, but if you want something a little different, then you'll have to order by mail. The American Daffodil Society website, www.daffodilusa.org, has a listing of both specialty growers and general bulb merchants. What's the difference? Well, a specialty grower is usually also the hybridizer of the bulb, and if you want something REALLY new, you'll want to order directly from the grower. The bulbs will be more expensive, but you'll be able to buy just one of a cultivar, if you like. Since the proprietor is the one who grew the bulb, and is likely to be the same person who fills your order, there's less chance of a mix-up or a substitution being made without your knowledge. A general bulb merchant buys bulbs in bulk. Usually the merchants sell bulbs grown in Holland. In Holland, growers grow the bulbs; brokers buy the bulbs from the growers; then they sell to the various people who issue catalogs. There's much more opportunity for the bulbs to get mixed up. Most bulb merchants sell bulbs priced by the dozen or twenty-five. If you don't want that many of the same cultivar, maybe you can get some friends together and combine an order.

So how do you decide where to order bulbs? I order mostly from specialist growers, because I exhibit and also breed daffodils, so I want the newer things. But they have bulbs in the \$3-\$5 price range, too. (Yes, per bulb. Think perennial plants! What would you pay for a quart size perennial? A gallon size? Daffodils are perennial plants that just happen to come from a bulb!) One of my favorite catalogs is from Mitsch Daffodils in Oregon. It's an old established family business. The current proprietors are Elise and Dick Havens. Elise's father was Grant Mitsch, arguably the best American breeder of daffodils. Along with many wonderful daffodils from Divisions 1-4, this catalog has the most extensive listing of the "smaller" daffodils in Divisions 5-7. They also list daffodils from David Jackson, in Australia. David Jackson has bred some of the finest daffodils available, and it's great to get them already acclimatized from Mitsch Daffodils. Of course you could order directly from David, but it would take a couple years for the bulb to "turn around" to Northern Hemisphere seasons.

Last year I ordered from Oakwood Daffodils, in Michigan, for the first time. The proprietor, John Reed, has been hybridizing daffodils for many years, and is just beginning to have enough of a cultivar to begin listing. Not only does he list his own hybrids, but he has a good selection of bulbs from other growers.

Two of my favorite growers from overseas are Hofflands Daffodils and Ringhaddy Daffodils. Both firms were begun by hobbyists with experience in exhibiting. Hofflands lists only those bred by the proprietor, John Pearson, and John is justly famous for his pale yellow flowers. Nial Watson of Ringhaddy has recently purchased the businesses of Ballydorn Bulb Farm and Brian Duncan Daffodils. He lists an extensive collection of daffodils bred in Northern Ireland.

Of the general bulb merchants, Brent Heath, of Brent and Becky's Bulbs, comes from an old daffodil family. Brent's grandfather started in the bulb business in Virginia in the early 1900s, but the bulbs are now grown in Holland. You can order online: www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com McClure and Zimmerman and Dutch Gardens are two bulb merchants with whom I've been pleased. Dutch Gardens impressed me one year by sending a duplicate shipment of my order—without my asking—because they had learned that some bulbs were not stored properly in shipment! McClure and Zimmerman has been quick to give credit or refunds when bulbs have arrived misnamed.

So send for catalogs, if you don't already have them. Now is the time to make your selections, and place your order. Waiting until planting time might mean you'll be disappointed if your selection is sold out.