

## A Quick Daffodil Review

January, 2003

Happy New Year! I hope everyone enjoyed the holidays. January is kind of a “down” month for daffodils. In the Southern Hemisphere, folks may be digging bulbs; while in the Northern Hemisphere, most of us are anticipating spring. Yes, there are a few winter-blooming daffodils, and in some parts of California, Texas, and Florida, and other Mediterranean-type climates, some daffodils may be in bloom. But for the rest of us, daffodil season is still a few months away.

So, let’s do a little review. What exactly IS the difference between a narcissus and a daffodil? If you said, “nothing,” then you’re absolutely correct. Narcissus is the botanical name of the genus, and daffodil is the common English name. Some folks say that “narcissus” refers to the late-blooming, fragrant white poeticus hybrids, and that the yellow ones are “daffodils.” They’d be wrong. My mother-in-law was one who thought that, and she’s the only person I never corrected! The terms are interchangeable. So what’s a jonquil, or a buttercup? In some areas, “jonquil” is used interchangeably with “daffodil,” but it should only be used when talking about jonquil hybrids, one branch of the family. And “buttercup”? When I lived in Tennessee, I found that some people used that term when referring to daffodils. That’s the only place I heard that, though.



So what do all those numbers and letters mean after the names of daffodils when you’re reading catalogs? And why do you need them? Well, the numbers and letters give an indication of what the daffodil looks like. The number refers to the shape, or division: 1, trumpet; 2, large cup; 3, small cup; 4, double; 5, triandrus hybrids; 6, cyclamineus hybrids; 7, jonquil hybrids; 8, tazetta hybrids; 9, poeticus hybrids; 10, bulbocodium hybrids; 11, split corona daffodils; and 12, any other daffodils. The letters indicate the colors of the daffodil. So, a 2 W-P would be a large-cupped daffodil with white perianth and a pink cup. A 3 W-GYO would be a small-cupped daffodil with a white perianth and the cup has a green eye, yellow mid-zone, and orange rim. Divisions 1, 2, and 3 differ only in the length of the cup in relation to the perianth. Division 4, double, is obvious. Division 5, think several pendent blooms to a stem, while Division 6

should have significantly reflexed perianths. Division 7s usually have several fragrant blooms to a stem. Division 8, think paperwhite-types, while Division 9 has the late flowers commonly referred to as pheasant-eye type. Division 10s are hoop-petticoat hybrids. In Division 11, the corona is split, and the segments

usually lie flat against the perianth. Division 12 includes those that don't fit neatly into any other division. It's easy, once you get the hang of it. And Division 13 includes all the different species and wild hybrids within the genus.

Daffodils are easy to grow—you can almost just dig a hole, drop the bulb in, cover it, and forget it. Obviously, the better you prepare the soil, the better the bulb will do over a long period. And daffodil bulbs should last a long time. They'll probably outlast us! Squirrels and other rodents don't eat the bulbs. There are a few pests, but not as many as most other ornamentals, and some cultivars are susceptible to rot. But that's about it, healthwise. If you buy healthy bulbs, you probably won't have problems. Now, they may stop blooming if the bulbs get overcrowded; and if you cut the foliage off too soon over a number of years, the bulbs will probably die. Cutting the foliage has been tested in England, and it showed that repeated cutting of the foliage two weeks after blooming damages the bulbs to the extent that the bulbs will die. Cutting after four weeks caused losses, but not as severe. Those cut six weeks after blooming showed no significant difference over the control bulbs. Oh, and you don't want to make nice neat foliage bundles, or tie up the foliage after blooming. This is one of those things that daffodil society members (and I'm one) tell people not to do, but I've never heard of any kind of testing to verify that. However, the good folks at the Missouri Botanic Garden (MOBOT) have planted a test garden this year to do just that. It will be interesting to see what results they have in a few years.

You can plant daffodils in most places in your garden. However . . . don't plant in full shade; partial shade is ok (a half day of sun is good, and some pink- and red-cupped ones actually benefit from shading in the heat), and you can plant under deciduous trees since the daffodils bloom and get some nourishment before the trees are fully out. Worst of all, don't plant in an area where water collects. Standing water in the heat of the summer is a certain death sentence for your bulbs. You can plant them under shallow-rooted ground cover. I've had some growing and blooming in pachysandra for 14 years. Doesn't do the ground cover much good, though, when you want to lift the daffodil bulbs! Deer won't eat them. They may step all over them, but they won't eat them. I don't think rabbits do, either. I've seen blooms cut off and lying on the ground, but not eaten.

Not all daffodils will grow in all areas, but there are some daffodils suitable for most places in the United States. You can get daffodils in all sizes, so you could find a place for them in any garden. Try the tazettas and jonquil hybrids in warmer climates. Many of the bulbocodium hybrids bloom in late winter. They should do well in warmer areas as well. Or check with the Florida Daffodil Society at <http://gamma.magnet.fsu.edu/fds/> for more information. Plant a few daffodils in your garden. You'll soon be looking forward to spring to see your daffodils, not just the end of winter!! Oh . . . don't forget to spread the ashes from your fireplace over your daffodil plantings. They'll love it.