

Hybridizing Daffodils

August, 2003

Why would anyone want to hybridize daffodils? After all, it takes upwards of five years from seed to blooming size bulb. So aside from observing the life cycle of a plant, why bother? Well, you just might come up with a world-beater! At the very least, you'll have bulbs that you know will do well in your area. White daffodils are notoriously susceptible to basal rot, especially in warmer climates. So if you live in a warm area, and breed a nice white daffodil that doesn't rot, you've got a good thing. You might even interest a bulb grower in listing it in his catalog. But even if you don't, you've got a really good white daffodil.



Amateur hybridizers DO get their bulbs into commerce. Some even start their own business to sell bulbs. Many of the best English/Irish breeders have done just that. The dean of the American amateur hybridizers is Bill Pannill of Virginia. His offerings are so good that several bulb suppliers list them. Some are even in the Dutch trade. Look for his 'Intrigue', a lovely pale yellow and white jonquil hybrid. It's so good in fact that it received The American Daffodil Society's Wister Award for outstanding garden plants in 1998. Bill's main interest is exhibiting, and serious exhibitors know they need his bulbs to compete. The American

Daffodil Society even has an award named for him which goes annually to an outstanding exhibition daffodil. His 'Homestead' won the award in 1998 and 'River Queen' is the award-winner for 2003. Both are all white daffodils. His 'Jingle Bells' (pictured) is one of the last to bloom in the season.

Bob Spotts lives in northern California, a difficult area for daffodils. Bob specializes in intermediate-sized flowers. At one time he thought he'd try growing triandrus hybrids, since there aren't very many. He soon discovered why there aren't many—most triandrus hybrids are sterile, so essentially you have to go back to using species with other daffodils. Bob has also used the autumn-flowering *N. viridiflorus* pollen on spring-blooming daffodils. He has some with distinctly greenish petals, and his 'Mesa Verde' (pictured) is one of the best. His best-known flower is 'Kokopelli', which confounds exhibitors, as it sometimes grows to standard size, and other times is miniature size. The seed was from an open-pollinated bloom of 'Sundial', which isn't supposed to be fertile. Bob planted the seed and got something good.



Another hybridizer who didn't give up on supposedly sterile flowers is Richard Brooke in England. He bred the charming 'Tripartite' from the supposedly sterile 'April Tears' crossed with the split-corona 'Baccarat'. The result is a stem with multiple blooms of little split-corona flowers which blooms at the end of daffodil season. It's widely available and well worth growing. It received the Wister Award in 1999.



Frank Galyon, in Knoxville, is trying to extend the daffodil blooming season. His breeding focuses on really early or really late flowers, but he also has others. His 'Millie Galyon' (pictured) is intense white and red, and his early miniature cyclamineus hybrids are coveted by all who see them. He had an outstanding little greenish white one on exhibit in Asheville.

Bill Gould works in relative obscurity in North Carolina. Obscurity because there are no shows nearby at his blooming time, so there's no place to show off his flowers. That certainly changed this year, since the ADS convention was in Asheville, and his flowers captured many of the top seedling awards.

In my part of Ohio there are several amateur hybridizers who vie for the awards in local shows. Depending on the season, Tom Stettner, Leone Low, Charles Wheatley, and I usually have entries, and each of us gets our share of prizes. Because I've been at it longer, my 'Three of Diamonds' has been available commercially (but the grower has retired) and 'Montpier' and a newly-named poeticus seedling, 'Rita Dove', will be available in the next few years.

There are amateur hybridizers working all around the world, mostly for their own pleasure. If we get something good enough to make it to commercial channels, that's a bonus. In the meantime, we have beautiful flowers to enjoy each spring.