

October is Bulb Planting Time

October, 2003

October's here, so if you live in the Northern Hemisphere, that must mean that it's time to think about planting daffodil bulbs. You can plant any time until the ground freezes, so if you live where it's still warm, especially if the soil is still warm, you can wait awhile. Most all my new bulbs have arrived, and so I'll be planting shortly.

Planting daffodils is easy—dig a hole, drop the bulb in, cover it, and stomp the soil down. See, it's easy! That's all that's really necessary, but of course the better preparation you make at planting time, the better the bulbs will perform for you over time. Daffodils aren't particular about soil type; they'll grow in both clay and sandy soils. Ph doesn't seem to matter much either, though there are some who say that a more acid soil will give better color in the blooms. What they DON'T want is to be planted in an area where water accumulates, that has poor drainage.

Choose a spot that gets at least a half-day of sun. Planting under and around trees works fine, provided the tree limbs are not low to the ground. The sunlight will come through the bare branches in spring, and the leaf canopy will not be too dense before the foliage dies down. But don't plant in the shade of evergreens or on the north side of the house. That shade is too dense for long-term health of your bulbs.

Prepare the soil well, digging as deeply as your back can stand. If your soil needs amending, now's the time to do it. I've used several things over the years—fine pine bark, clay soil conditioner, granite grit, and this year I'm going to use perlite. A friend of mine pointed out that it's much lighter weight than the others, and it lasts forever. I'm also going to put a handful of perlite directly under the bulb. My friend says the bulbs come out of the ground nice and clean, easily. I've gardened in the same area for a number of years, so I'll only be digging about 6-7 inches deep. I may mix in a little low nitrogen fertilizer in the bottom of the hole, but if I don't, I'll broadcast fertilizer over the top of the garden when I'm done. The bulbs get planted about twice as deep as the bulb is tall. And as another friend says, "The pointy end goes up." A group of three bulbs, planted about 8-10 inches apart, will make a nice show in the garden. Don't plant them in a straight line; a triangular planting works well. Of course, you might buy just one bulb of a more expensive cultivar. That's fine, too. But stagger the single bulbs in between other plants. In a couple years, the one bulb will give a nice show. If you're hoping to enter your blooms in a daffodil show next spring, be sure to put a label by the bulb, or make a map of your planting. You want to be able to identify your beauties next spring.



If you choose to naturalize daffodils, throw a handful of bulbs on the ground and then plant where they land. Don't plant in a geometric block. The aim is to make them look natural, with some planted more closely together, with others drifting away from the main group.

If you're looking for plants to share garden space with your daffodils, you might consider daylilies for sunny areas and hostas for shade. Both plants work well with daffodils, having pretty much the same cultural requirements. And marigolds are perfect for summer color, and have the added bonus of repelling soil nematodes.

However you choose to plant daffodils, you can be assured of a bright beginning to spring.