

December Musings

December, 2004

For most of us, December brings all the rush of holiday time. In my area, most of the garden work is done. The ground isn't frozen yet, so there's still time to plant bulbs. Just be sure the bulbs you plant are firm and solid. You might find some bargains at the local garden store, or home improvement store; but they're no bargains if the bulbs are soft. Soft bulbs are most likely rotting and there's no point planting them.

If you hurry, you still have time to pot up bulbs to force for earlier bloom next spring. Choose either plastic or clay pots. Plastic pots have the advantage of not drying out as rapidly as clay pots, they are easier to clean and lighter in weight as well as less expensive. However, many prefer clay bulb pans or pots. Bulbs grow equally well in either. Six- to eight-inch pots are recommended for daffodils. Give the pots a good scrubbing, and give clay pots a good soaking before use. These days I use about half granite grit and half soil in my potting mix, since I have a tendency to overwater. After planting and watering, you have to keep the pots at a temperature between 35–45°F for 13-15 weeks before bringing them into the house. The important thing to remember is that the minimum length of the total cold treatment should be 13 weeks; 15 weeks are preferred. That's why you have to hurry. To get really spectacular pots, plant a double layer of bulbs.

It's a lot easier to buy some bulbs of paperwhites and grow them on pebbles in a shallow bowl of water. Just be sure the water comes only to the base of the bulbs so they don't rot. Once the roots are growing, the bulbs will be firmly anchored in the bowl. This is an easy gardening project for kids. The roots grow fast and are soon followed by the blooms. But be warned—you'll either love or hate the scent! There's no middle ground!

A few paperwhite bulbs and bowl makes a nice gift for your gardening friend. Or how about a 50 pound bag of potash? For under \$10 your friend can feed all the daffodils in the garden. The daffodils will think it's caviar. And you can even give your friend some caviar so everyone's happy. And maybe a little bubbly along with it . . .

Gardening books are always good gifts for gardeners, and Daffodils for American Gardens by Brent and Becky Heath is one of the best. A membership in The American Daffodil Society would also be a great gift. You can join online at www.daffodilusa.org. A friend of mine wrapped some elegant silk daffodils in a florist's box and presented them along with a gift card telling about the membership. It's a gift that will be welcomed all year, when the quarterly journals arrive in the mail to remind your friend of your thoughtfulness. Or how about a gift certificate for daffodil bulbs? I know Mitsch Daffodils has gift certificates available. (www.web-ster.com/havensr/mitsch/) Other bulb merchants might

also. You could ask that a catalog be sent in spring and your friend can choose his/her favorites.

When the gardening and shopping are all finished, sit back and relax in front of the fire. Be sure to save the ashes for spreading on your daffodil beds later. More potash!

Happy Holidays!