

Anticipating Spring

March, 2005

In many places in the United States, daffodils are blooming, and have been for awhile. But here in the Ohio Valley, we're still anticipating the arrival of spring. Mother Nature teases us with a few warm days, but then turns right around and blows the cold North Wind our way again.

Georgene suggested I say something about my coldframe, since I have mentioned it several times in my monthly articles. I need to start out by saying I'm cheap—so my coldframe is not a thing of beauty. But it might be a joy forever. It certainly allows me to grow some daffodils that would otherwise be difficult in my climate.

My Dad had a "hotbed" when I was kid. It wasn't heated in any way—just the sun on the glass provided extra protection. He started his cabbage and tomato plants from seed in it. I don't think he put manure under the soil for added heat, but it's been too many years ago, and at that time I wasn't much interested in a "hotbed."

My own coldframes are simply an assortment of landscape timbers topped with a pane of glass or a pane of plastic. I used glass originally because I had some thermopane windows which had lost their seal and had been replaced. So they became the covers of my coldframes. Eventually, water got between the panes of glass and they broke. So then I used the unbroken pane until weather or carelessness broke that pane as well. I now have four coldframes, one with a glass cover and the others with plastic. The plastic is about 1/8-3/16" thick, and it works well; but it has both advantages and disadvantages. The advantage is the lighter weight and less chance of being cut; the disadvantage is that it tends to bow in when we have a heavy snowfall.

I first used my coldframe for my pots of daffodil seeds. The seeds are in individual pots, and the pots sunk in the ground. I didn't need to worry about not having a tall coldframe, because by the time the seed germinated in the spring, I could usually take the top off anyway. Then I began to acquire some bulbs that send up foliage up in the fall. After having the foliage frozen off when the bulbs were planted in the open ground, I decided that wasn't good for the bulbs, so I potted them up and sunk them in the coldframe. With foliage up during the winter, I needed to make the coldframe taller, so I simply added a layer of landscape timbers. Like many things, my need for coldframe space grew like topsy, and so now I have four coldframes plus a garden cart that goes in and out

of the garage as the weather permits. There's a nice pot of 'Spoirot' blooming on it now. 'Spoirot' is a bulbocodium hybrid, like the "hoop petticoats" you can buy in the fall. It does much better now than when it was planted outside. And since it wants to be completely dry over the summer, being on the garden cart makes it easy.

You can buy fancy coldframes that open automatically when the temperature inside them gets to a certain point. I have to go open the tops myself, but then I get to see what's going on inside. Today I found a bud showing color on a pot of *N. assoanus* which I've grown from seed. I might have missed that if the coldframe opened automatically. And ideally, the frame should be taller at the back than the front, so that everything gets sunlight. I just take off the front timber when I take off the glass/plastic cover.

There are buds coming on some others—'Angel's Breath', 'Angel o'Music', and 'Angel's Whisper' all have buds coming. When they bloom, I'll be able to bring a fragrant pot of flowers indoors. That's another advantage of a coldframe.