

# The King of Daffodils Is Dead: Long Live the Kings!

Ads by Google View ads about:

| [Home & Hearth](#) | [Outdoors](#) | [Home](#)

7/11/07 (ARA) - Every fall, thousands of daffodils bearing the name King Alfred are sold and planted in the United States. The following spring, their golden blooms brighten landscapes from coast to coast. That's an amazing feat for a bulb that has been out of commercial production for many years.

## The Power of the Name

How can a daffodil that is no longer grown be sold in such quantities? The answer requires a brief look at King Alfred's history.

King Alfred was bred toward the end of the 19th century by an Englishman named John Kendall, who died in 1890 without ever seeing his creation bloom. His sons introduced it several years later, and the King caused an immediate stir in the daffodil world. Experts marveled at the size of the blooms, their rich golden color, their great substance, their grace. In the spring of 1899, King Alfred received a First Class Certificate, the highest award granted by the Royal Horticultural Society.



News of the fabulous new daffodil soon spread. In 1900, Kendall's sons offered bulbs for the princely sum of 6 pounds 6 shillings each (which at that time would also buy about half a ton of coal or pay the wages of a laborer for more than six weeks). A year later the price had fallen to 5 pounds 5 shillings, and it continued to drop as King Alfred went from being a rarity to the standard gold trumpet daffodil.



Eventually, the name King Alfred became synonymous with golden daffodils, the way Kleenex is often used for facial tissues and Xerox for photocopiers. Meanwhile, breeders continued to make improvements, introducing varieties with larger blooms and better form and that performed better as cut flowers. By the middle of the

20th century, King Alfred bulb production had begun to decline as growers switched over to newer varieties. The day soon came when there weren't enough bulbs to fill all the requests for King Alfred. Rather than disappoint their customers, some bulb companies chose to supply other varieties under the familiar name.

### Today's Gold Standard-bearers

According to the 2006-2007 listing of daffodil cultivation in Holland, only a tenth of an acre is planted with true King Alfred. The once mighty monarch is now a historical curiosity, but the power of the name -- especially in the United States -- is hardly diminished.

Tim Schipper, owner of Colorblends, a wholesale flowerbulb company based in Bridgeport, Conn., continues to marvel at the staying power of King Alfred. "It's amazing how entrenched the name King Alfred is. King Alfred was a great daffodil and had a 60-year reign, which is pretty long for a daffodil. Eventually bulb production declined and other varieties took its place."

So what are the alternatives to the departed king? Most of the bulbs sold as King Alfred (or "King Alfred type" or "King Alfred Improved") are actually Dutch Master, another golden trumpet daffodil. Dutch Master has won several prestigious awards in its career, but Schipper doesn't list it in his catalog. "The flowers of Dutch Master often look down," he says. "They also have a tendency to fade quickly, and the petals sometimes burn in the sun." Instead he recommends a trio of daffodils he calls The Gold Standard: Golden Harvest, Marieke and Carlton.

Golden Harvest is a descendant of King Alfred, and like the King it is a trumpet daffodil. It has large and long-lasting bright yellow flowers with a big ruffled trumpet. Golden Harvest is no spring chicken (it dates back to the early years of the 20th century), but its vigor and strong perennial nature continue to endear it to growers and gardeners. "The bright yellow daffodils that you see along the roadside are often Golden Harvest," says Schipper.



Marieke (pronounced mar-EE-keh) is a relative newcomer: the original bulb flowered in 1960, but it took three decades to build the following it has today. Marieke is also a trumpet daffodil, with big golden yellow flowers that face out and up at the viewer. The blooms have lots of substance ("when you touch the trumpets," says Schipper, "they feel amazingly firm"), and they also have a light, sweet scent.

Last but by no means least, is Carlton, an heirloom variety (it's been around since at least 1927) that is still very much in its prime: There are more Carlton grown than any other daffodil in the world. It is a large-cupped variety with soft yellow petals and a frilly, golden yellow cup that give the flowers a two-tone effect. Like Golden Harvest, Carlton has a strong perennial nature. It also performs well where winters are mild and summers are hot and humid. "When customers in the South ask for a dependable all-yellow daffodil, we always point them to Carlton," says Schipper. "According to the Florida Daffodil Society, it blooms and multiplies well even in Tallahassee."

### Daffodil Diversity

There will always be something fun about a mass of golden trumpet daffodils, but today's gardeners have plenty of other colors, shapes and sizes to choose from. "Many people are excited to learn that yellow trumpets are just the tip

of the daffodil iceberg,” says Schipper. “We carry white daffodils with pink cups, yellow daffodils with orange cups, miniature daffodils, double daffodils, split corona daffodils. The list goes on and on. Yellow? Yeah, we’ve got that -- and a whole lot more.”

### **For More Information**

You can learn more about daffodils by visiting [www.colorblends.com](http://www.colorblends.com) or [www.daffodildepot.com](http://www.daffodildepot.com), or you can call (888) 847-8637 to request the Colorblends 2007 wholesale catalog.

Courtesy of ARAcontent