

The best daffodils and narcissi to grow your garden, whether in pots, grass or borders

Charles Quest-Ritson March 10, 2019



Credit: Alamy

With more than 26,000 to choose from, it can be agonising deciding which narcissus to grow. Charles Quest-Ritson asks daffodil doyenne Christine Skelmersdale for ideas.

Nothing beats daffodils as a symbol of spring. Their yellow cheerfulness tells us that winter is gone and will not come again. Even if their flowering coincides with snow or frost enough to flatten their stems, they pick themselves up again as soon as temperatures rise.

Deciding which ones to grow isn't easy: there are 26,000 registered cultivars. 'It's best to choose those ones that have been given Awards of Garden Merit (AGM) by the RHS,' says Christine Skelmersdale. 'They will be weatherproof, garden-worthy and hold their flowers well clear of their leaves.'

'All daffodils are narcissi, but not all narcissi are daffodils'

No one knows more about daffodils than Christine, who's run Broadleigh Gardens, the mail-order nursery for small bulbs, for more than 40 years. Her advice is founded on growing 250 different cultivars in her Somerset garden, seeing narcissus species in the wild and spending more than 30 years as a member of the RHS Daffodil & Tulip Committee, as well as testing thousands of new daffodils in the RHS trials and mounting innumerable gold-medal-winning exhibits at Chelsea and other shows up and down the country.

The best way to grow daffodils in the garden is to plant 5–10 bulbs of one cultivar in small clumps in a border. They look especially enticing when grown among deciduous shrubs, where their colour combines or contrasts with the new leaves of the shrubs.



You mustn't cut off their leaves until at least six weeks after they've finished flowering. Incidentally, they don't need deadheading either, although you may prefer to remove the fading flowers for aesthetic reasons.

Garden daffodils need nothing more to flourish than garden soil, good drainage and lots of rain when growing and flowering. The bulbs lie dormant during the summer – the best time to split up the clumps and spread them around – but begin to put out roots again in early autumn.

You don't need to split the clumps every year, but, once they start producing lots of leaves, but not many flowers, it's a sign that they're getting congested and that the bulbs will benefit from lifting and replanting with space to develop. You can do this when they fade, but while you can still see the leaves.

All narcissi bulk up quickly over the years and require no special treatment. Just plant them and watch them grow.

Visit www.broadleighbulbs.co.uk to gain a deeper understanding of bulbs.

The five best narcissi for naturalising in grass



Wild Daffodil Narcissus Lobularis.

○ **Narcissus lobularis** is the wild daffodil that Wordsworth admired. It is of medium height, with pale-yellow flowers, much more subtly coloured than many garden varieties.

○ **N. bulbocodium**, or the **hoop-petticoat narcissus**, is widespread in northern and central Spain, growing in damp meadows with acid soil. That environment is what it prefers in gardens, too. See it in swathes at RHS Wisley, The Savill Garden, Windsor, and RHS Rosemoor.



Daffodil Genus *Narcissus* Cultivar 'February Gold'.

○ **February Gold** has medium-sized flowers and is bright yellow with folded-back perianths. It flowers in late February or early March.

○ **Actaea** is the best form of the pheasant-eye narcissus, **N. poeticus**. It is the last of all narcissi to flower, continuing well into May. Good in borders, too.



Narcissus 'Actaea'.

○ **N. Rijnveld's Early Sensation** is a medium-sized trumpet daffodil with bright-yellow flowers, outstanding for its early flowering, from mid December onwards in mild areas

○ Consider also for naturalising: **Little Gem, Jack Snipe** and **W. P. Milner**

The five best narcissi for pots in the garden

The best have many flower stems, not too tall, but bearing several flowers, set off by narrow leaves. Mix them with other bulbs and spring-flowerers for a satisfying display over many weeks.

○ **Toto** is a floriferous mid-season beauty, with perky clusters of creamy trumpets and white perianths. Beautiful planted with blue muscari or scillas.



Hyacinth planted with narcissus 'Toto' RHS Garden Wisley.

○ **N. papyracea Ziva** is the best form of the **paper-white narcissus**, a tender species from damp Mediterranean meadows. Pot up in early winter and keep on a windowsill. Very fragrant.

○ **Tête Bouclé'** is a double-flowered sport of **Tête à Tête** and a good clumper. Plump buds, bright-yellow flowers with hints of orange at the centre – very pretty. Mid season, about 8in high.



Narcissus 'Hawera'.

○ **Hawera** – this hybrid of **N. triandrus** has nodding clusters of pale yellow rather late in the season. Best in acid soils, where the clumps will increase quickly.

○ **N. rupicola** is a neat little jonquil, bright yellow and strongly scented, from central Spain. Best grown in pots in a cold greenhouse or in acid soil in a trough. Sharp drainage essential.



Narcissus 'Sailboat'

○ Consider also for large pots and planters: **Spring Dawn, Sailboat, Starlight Sensation, Sunlight Sensation and Moonlight Sensation.**

The five best narcissi for borders

The intermediate-sized cultivars – not too tall – fit into the garden best. Early-flowerers are especially valuable.



Flowerbed with tulips saxatilis and daffodils 'Thalia'.

- **Thalia** has pure-white flowers in graceful clusters; strong, sweet scent. Popular for more than a century for its vigour and persistence, especially in acid soils.
- **Telamonius Plenus** is perhaps the oldest double daffodil and still among the best. It has 1ft-high stems, wavy perianths and a mass of petals in the middle – bright yellow with hints of green and orange.



All white Daffodil 'Mount Hood'.

○ **Mount Hood** – famous all-white trumpet daffodil, still the best. Tall, but tough. Large flowers with elegant crinkly coronas, ivory white at first, but quickly turning to glistening brilliant white. Incomparable.

○ **Tête-à-Tête** is the most successful of Alec Gray's hybrids, now grown in billions worldwide. Short, sturdy and vigorous; each bulb carries several stems of bright yellow trumpets in March.



Early flowering miniature daffodils Tête-à-Tête on blue spring meadow.

○ **Kokopelli** is a jonquil hybrid with all their charm and a whirl of broad, lemon-yellow petals and darker coronas. Long-lasting – and deliciously scented. Vigorous, tough, 12in high.

○ Consider also for herbaceous borders: **Jenny, Geranium, Quail, Itzim, Jetfire.**
