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How to Plant Daffodils

And how to get them to thrive—year after year.

BY ARRICCA ELIN SANSONE JUN 28, 2019



TIM GRAHAM / GETTY IMAGES

Daffodils are a sure sign that spring is (finally!) on its way. “They bloom early before there’s much other color in the garden,” says grower Brent Heath of Brent and Becky’s Bulbs. “Because they perennialize, or come back year after year, you get a lot of bang for your buck. Also, the bulbs and leaves are poisonous, so critters such as deer and rodents won’t bother them.”

Here’s what you need to know to grow these lovely spring-blooming bulbs:

What kinds of daffodils should you plant?



Daffodils, also called narcissus, grow in USDA Hardiness zones 3 to 8 (check your zone [here](#)). That's most of the country except for regions that don't get enough cold weather, which the bulbs need to form flowers.

Daffodils come in many different sizes and hues, ranging from creamy white to pale yellow with center cups in shades of white, red or pink. Some types, such as those called "jonquilla," are sweetly fragrant with long-lasting blooms.

100 Wild Daffodil Flower Bulbs

[amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)

\$45.99

SHOP NOW

The Best Varieties to Try:

- Moonlight Sensation
- Fellows Favorite
- Hawera

Where can I buy daffodil bulbs?

Retailers sell daffodil bulbs in summer and fall. Look for firm bulbs, avoiding squishy ones or those with white mold (blue-gray mold is okay). The weight should feel closer to a golf ball than a ping pong ball. You also can preorder bulbs from online suppliers earlier in the season for a wider selection; they'll ship when it's time to plant, because you don't want bulbs sitting around for more than 3 months. "They get dried out, like an onion that's been left around too long," says Heath.

When should you plant daffodils?

Daffodils do best when planted after the first frost, but before the ground freezes in your area. That's any time from October to mid-December, depending on where you live. But no worries if you discover a bag of bulbs you forgot to plant before the ground froze! Plant them in a pot of soil, and keep it in your garage. Next spring, place them in your garden where you find a bare spot, says Heath.

How do I plant daffodils?

Daffodils need full sun, which means about six hours per day. Place the pointy-side up in the hole. Plant at a depth of about 3 times the height of the bulb. Keep bulbs about 3 times their width apart, because they need room to spread as the bulbs multiply. But don't plant a single bulb here and there throughout the garden; daffodils look more striking when they're bunched together.

It's not necessary to add fertilizer to the hole when planting. "Even though some sources tell you to do so, it's sort of like giving them an energy drink," says Heath. "It gives them quick energy, but too much nitrogen will encourage leaf growth but not blooms." Instead, improve the soil itself by adding compost, organic fertilizer, or wood ashes, which are filled with micronutrients that daffodils love, on top of the bed after planting.

How do I care for daffodils?

Once they've bloomed next spring, don't remove the leaves until they're yellow and flopping over. The plant needs them to make food for next year's blooms. It's a good idea to plant daffodils among other perennials and annuals because those plants will hide the fading foliage. Also daffodils prefer to remain somewhat dry during their dormancy in summer, so placing other plants near them helps prevent the bulbs from getting too wet.