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Spring blooms such as daffodils bring joy to a garden

By Elizabeth Farrell
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Daffodils usually bloom in early spring.

"I wandered lonely as a cloud

That floats on high o'er vales and hills,

When all at once I saw a crowd,

A host of golden daffodils,

Beside the lake, beneath the trees

Fluttering and dancing in the breeze"

William Wordsworth, a Romantic poet of the Lake District of England, immortalized the daffodil in verse. His life was not always easy. Orphaned as a young boy, Wordsworth later suffered the loss of two of his children within a short period of time.

He spent unsettled years in France during the Revolution, but eventually returned to the beauty and peace of his homeland. He found solace in nature, spoke for the "common man" and came to be honored as poet laureate.

Call them narcissus, jonquils or daffodils, they bring great joy to a garden, and they don't ask much from a gardener in return. Likewise, other brave and hardy flowers grow from bulbs over the winter and display their finery in spring, signaling renewal.

It is not a difficult task for the gardener to grow crocus, tulips, daffodils and hyacinths, etc. Each bulb contains the nourishment it requires to bloom. Our job is to determine the best location and soil conditions to support root growth over winter and to plant accordingly.

As a rule of thumb bulbs should be planted before the first heavy frost in the fall, in a sunny spot with well-drained soil. If you are not sure about the pH of your soil, consider having it tested and adjust as necessary.

Healthy bulbs are firm, damage-free bulbs. Usually they are planted to a depth 3 times the length of the bulb. Read the labels to be sure of specific instructions. Dig the hole, loosen the soil and mix with organic material such as good compost. Plant the pointed edge upward and tamp the flatter base end into the soil. Water as needed but do not overwater, as soggy soil may rot the bulbs.

You may fertilize the soil over the bulb. The bulbs will take over from there. Sit back and wait for spring to enjoy the fruit of your labor. The flowers will not only be beautiful but will provide food and habitat for pollinators.

Snowdrops and crocus are the first to rear their heads, sometimes poking out from beneath a cover of snow. Both are quite small and very hardy; you may enjoy their blooms year after year. Dig them up only as needed to divide.

Daffodils come in many lovely varieties, usually blooming in early spring. Tulips are very pleasing and offer so many choices of color, size and shape. Unfortunately, they may well be a favored snack of the critters that visit your garden. Check the labels to determine bloom times as taller specimens may bloom later.

With this knowledge you may space bulbs creatively, and plan for a continuous display of color in your spring garden. Next, enjoy the lovely scented hyacinths in a variety of colors. Blooming later in spring are allium, members of the onion family that grow to 2-3 feet tall. They produce one large striking round flower atop one stem.

To preserve the life of the bulbs, take care after blooming. Do not remove or braid the foliage. It is the foliage that serves to bring nourishment back into the bulb, via photosynthesis that requires sunlight. Therefore, you will jeopardize the life of the bulb if you destroy the foliage.

Do find joy in creating your own garden of dancing daffodils: it is food for the soul.

Elizabeth Farrell is a volunteer with the Berks County Master Gardeners.

Spotted lanternfly update

In addition to scraping and destroying spotted lanternfly egg masses during this time of year, it's also time to prepare for eliminating ailanthus trees.

If you plan to control the Tree of Heaven with a systemic herbicide, now is the best time to clear away the surrounding vegetation while it is in winter dormancy, making it easier to access the trees later at the proper time for treatment.

For informative articles and videos on controlling ailanthus trees and spotted lanternfly go to extension.psu.edu/spotted-lanternfly, select Spotted Lanternfly Management.
