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Narcissus_pseudonarcissus_flower

Gardening: Did you know there are 13,000 types of daffodils?

By Olive Ryan

'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.'

THIS description of daffodils in the famous William Wordsworth poem is very evocative of many a sight when out taking a walk at this time of the year as we head into April.

Yellow flowers are in abundance at this time of the year and one of the main reasons for this is that plants flowering early in the year need to adapt and

maximize their ability to attract pollinators as there are fewer flying pollinators earlier in the year.

Yellow is a very effective colour at attracting pollinators, even during the lower light levels existing during shorter days.

Narcissus, or daffodils as they are commonly known, are one of the most cheerful flowers in spring. There are many different cultivars flowering from February right through to April/May.

While their predominant colour is yellow, they also come in shades of cream and white, orange and even pink!



Narcissus 'Actaea' a poeticus daffodil.

It is uncertain if we have a native daffodil, *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* is native to England and Wales but is believed to be naturalized here in Ireland. It is an elegant daffodil with very simple flowers bearing deep yellow trumpets and pale yellow outer segments.

Planting different cultivars is a rewarding occupation and one you will congratulate yourself for when you go to pick a bunch of daffodils next spring.

There are more than 13,000 different types of daffodils, identified and differentiated using their overall shape, petal colour and cup colour. In all, there

are 13 recognised divisions which they are classified into – trumpet, large cup, small cup, bulbocodium, poeticus and cyclamineus to name a few.

These perennial bulbous plants, for the most part originate from Europe and North Africa. They are generally tolerant of a wide range of growing conditions but being bulbs good drainage is a high priority. They usually flower best in full sun with a few cultivars like Narcissus 'Lemon Drops' and N. 'Acatea' suitable for partial shade. All parts of daffodils are poisonous, with the bulb being the most toxic part.

Bulbs that have been mistaken for onions and eaten are known to have caused vomiting, diarrhoea, stomach cramps and mouth and throat irritation, so eating these bulbs is not to be recommended!

Sometimes, daffodils do not flower very well and this can be for a number of reasons. Most commonly they can become congested over time as the bulbs multiply each year and the clump increases. In this case, the best course of action is to dig up the clump, divide the bulbs and replant at 2-3 times the depth of the bulb.

If the foliage is not left to die back into the bulb, that is, if the foliage is removed prematurely, which can often be a temptation, particularly when they are planted in grassed areas, then the bulb is denied potential energy for next year's flowering.

The leaves continue to photosynthesize for about six weeks after flowering and this creates food and bulks up the bulb beneath the soil in preparation for a good flower display the following year.



Daffodil-Pink-Champagne, a double daffodil.

Cutting the foliage back or knotting the strappy leaves to neaten the look of the dying foliage can have an adverse effect on flowering the next year.

If bulbs are planted in poor soil, they may flower well the first year and then produce foliage and no flowers subsequently. A feed with garden compost or a granular feed high in potassium will help remedy this.

Deadheading when they have finished flowering will help direct the plant's energy into the bulb instead of seed production. Bulbs planted in a very dry location under mature trees, for example, will benefit from watering after flowering, particularly if there is no rain after flowering.

This weekend, we have an extra hour of daylight after the clocks sprung forward. Longer evenings to entice us out into the garden to get to grips with

all the spring jobs and preparation for the growth spurt that will inevitably happen in the next few weeks.

The soil is humming with life that is about to burst forward, an exciting time of the year and reassuring with all of the uncertainty in the world currently.

Even when we are all struggling, trying to adjust to our new restricted routines, nature is thriving and getting ready for new life. Birds are building their nests and preparing for new chicks, spring lambs are kicking up their heels, and when all of this is over so, will we.

Meantime, getting out into the garden and putting your hands into the soil, focusing on getting an area weeded, planted or tidied, is good for the mind, body and spirit. Happy and healthy Spring Gardening.



The dainty flowers of 'Narcissus 'Hawera' just beginning to flower now, an example of a triandrus daffodil

Plant of the week

This week it has to be a good-looking daffodil and we are spoilt for choice right now. Looking really great now is a dwarf daffodil called Narcissus 'Hawera' with its pale lemon yellow flowers with short trumpets and recurved outer segments giving the flowers the appearance of shuttlecocks.

It belongs to the triandrus group of daffodils and usually bears 5-6 nodding flowers per stem, beginning to appear in late March/early April.

The flowers get to about 20-25cm in height and it has slender grassy foliage. Generally easily grown on most sites, and as with most bulbs, good drainage is essential.