

A daffodil by any other name

Kylee Baumle, Columnist, "In the Garden"

Friday, May 1, 2020 5:00 AM

On the eve of that unwanted snow a couple of weeks ago, I went outside to cut some daffodils that were open and just about to open. While I like seeing them in my garden more than in my house, I felt that I didn't really have much choice, in light of the number of inches of snow that were predicted. It was cut them or lose them.

I'm aware that these spring ephemerals can handle quite a bit of cold. I can remember taking photos of snow on tulips and they shook it off, dismissing the attempt to cut their performance short. But I wasn't taking any chances.

I'd done the same thing a week before that, when freezing temperatures and high winds were predicted. I wasn't worried so much about the cold that time, but I knew that wind can whip blossoms, rendering them wilted and shredded on the edges. I had five glorious bouquets, and though daffodils aren't known to be intensely fragrant, I could still detect their delicate and beautiful scent of spring.

This second time I made a cutting, my husband said to me, "Are there still daffodils blooming?" The ones I'd brought in the first time were bright yellow, some with orange coronas, and cutting them had left only green foliage in their wake. He saw that cutting as the end of the season for them.

I explained that daffodils have early, mid-, and late season varieties. (So do tulips.) The second time, I rescued the smaller all-white ones – 'Thalia' – and a couple of other white ones with pale yellow coronas. He hadn't noticed that they were on the cusp of blooming, but I had.

'Thalia' is one of my favorites, not just because it's the purest white, through and through, but because most of them, if the bulbs reach a size large enough, will have two, sometimes three, blooms on single stems. Each opens in succession, extending their bloom.

They're one of a special classification of the genus, *Narcissus*. The American Daffodil Society recognizes 13 classes of daffodils, based on their flower shape. 'Thalia' falls into the class called Triandrus. All of the daffodils in this class perform well in shade and naturalize well for zones 3-8.

Another favorite of mine is 'Jetfire' because it's a very early bloomer, the first in my own garden. It belongs to the Cyclamineus class. These are usually smaller, with reflexed petals and small cups. These work well for forcing. 'Tete-a-Tete' also belongs in this class.

Jonquilla daffodils are prolific bloomers, having 2-6 blooms per stem. The flowers are petite and the foliage can be grasslike. These grow well in southern gardens, are good for forcing and will naturalize readily. All of them are known to be fragrant. I've got 'Pipit' in my garden and it's charmingly cute.

Tazetta daffodils aren't hardy for us, but they're excellent for forcing, which many people do. You may recognize them by their names of 'Ziva', 'Falconet', and others. They do well in southern gardens.

Poeticus are favorites of many and you can find them growing in abandoned farmhouse locations. They naturalize readily, have white petals with short cups, and are wonderfully fragrant. You may know them as poet's narcissus, paper narcissus, or by their varietal names like 'Pheasant Eye' and 'Actea'.

Split Corona can be recognized by their ruffy coronas that are split and lay back against the petals. They have larger flowers on long stems and make beautiful bouquets. 'Lemon Beauty' grows in our gardens. They're mid- to late season bloomers. There are two subdivisions in this class, based on the placement of the petals: Collar and Papillon.

Trumpets are large and showy daffodils, with the cup often longer than the petals, and one flower per stem. They're very hardy (Zones 3-7) and naturalize well. 'Mount Hood' and 'Dutch Master' are excellent examples of this class.

The other classes are Large Cup, Small Cup, Double, Bulbocodium, Species and Wild, and Other. Miniature daffodils are not a separate class, but are smaller versions with characteristics of the other classes.

Once daffodils have completed their blooms cycle, be sure to let the foliage die back on its own rather than cutting it. The foliage continues to feed the bulb and prepares it to form next year's blooms. Once the foliage has turned yellow, photosynthesis is no longer occurring and it's fine to cut it back.

A great feature of daffodils is that they are toxic to deer and squirrels. If you have problems with one eating the young shoots and flowers of your spring bulbs and the other digging them up, plant more daffodils.

Read more at Kylee's blog, Our Little Acre, at www.ourlittleacre.com. Contact her on Facebook or by email at pauldingprogressgardener@gmail.com.



Submit a comment

* indicates a required field