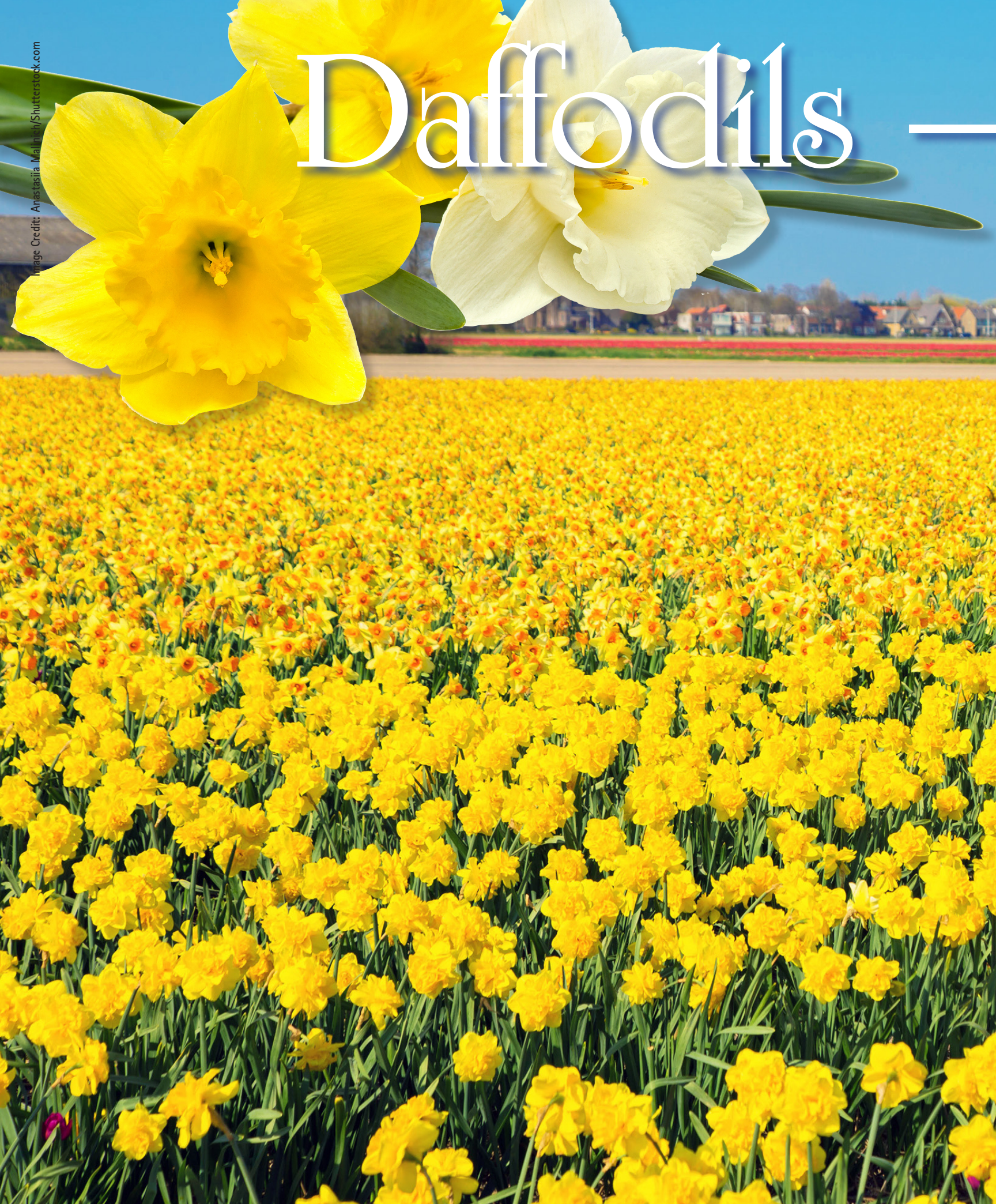


Daffodils —



— The Glory of Spring

Candace Brown

One example of *faith* is the comforting certainty that, regardless of the severity of winter or the misfortunes of mankind, spring will *always* come again. Nothing announces this uplifting season of hope and renewal like the sight of daffodils. Their appeal as one of the first flowers to appear at winter's end made them popular even in ancient times, as they gained cultural and religious importance. Descriptions of daffodils in botanical literature date back to at least 300 B.C. Native to the Mediterranean region, daffodils spread across Europe when the conquering Roman army carried and planted the bulbs in the mistaken belief that the flower sap, which is actually toxic, had medicinal properties. The ease of transporting the bulbs, along with their heartiness and ability to grow in a range of elevations and soil conditions, helped them spread. Colonists brought them to North America. Daffodils came to represent love, friendship, fertility, and, for Christians, the Resurrection, creating the long tradition of giving daffodils at Easter. Healthy bulbs can easily outlive those who plant them and have long been shared with friends, passed down in families, and carried to new homes as heirlooms. Most of us take these common flowers for granted and do not realize how many kinds exist or how many people around the world collect, study, hybridize, and love them. Learning more about daffodils becomes a rewarding journey.

After being planted in the fall, the bulb begins to grow roots over the winter. It also provides nutrients and protection for the developing embryonic flower bud hidden in its heart. When spring arrives, green leaf tips emerge and push up through the soil, sometimes even through snow. Soon you will see a leafless stem and one or more flower buds, depending on the species. They will open to display a distinctive type of bloom composed of a trumpet or cup-shaped center (the

corona), surrounded by petals (the perianth). When happily situated, the bulbs will multiply over time to become a gorgeous display. They appeal to humans for many reasons, but not to deer, rabbits, or gophers.

The word "daffodil" usually brings to mind the classic large, single, yellow bloom with a trumpet corona at least as long or longer than the petals. The fact is, enough different flower forms exist to make up 13 descriptive Divisions for categorizing based on features. The cup-type coronas can be large, small, shallow, less shallow, or split, but the cup is always shorter than the petals. "Doubles" feature a center made of many petal-like segments, resembling a peony. Daffodils range in size from 5-inch blooms on 24-inch stems to miniatures with blooms as small as half an inch on 3-inch stems. Jonquils have 1-5 white or yellow flowers per stem. Tazetta daffodils dazzle with 3-20 flowers per stem and include the popular and intensely fragrant subspecies known as "paperwhites," often forced into bloom indoors in the winter. Combinations of petal and corona colors include not only shades of yellow (from dark to pale), but also orange, white, cream, pink, peach, apricot, and even touches of green.

People often use the names "jonquil" and "narcissus" incorrectly to describe daffodils with multiple blooms on a stem, multiple stems, or with white flowers. Botanically speaking, the 40-200 species, subspecies, and varieties (depending on who you ask) plus the 32,000 registered cultivars, all belong to the genus *Narcissus* within the Amaryllis (Amaryllidaceae) family of plants. The American Daffodil Society (ADS) refers to them collectively using the English word "daffodil." The Latin word "narcissus" is more commonly used in scientific papers. No matter what you call these springtime charmers, they grow easily if given a good start in a choice location and basic care. For those wanting to

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PRETTY BUT TOXIC

Those who love daffodils feel lucky that the Romans introduced them to Europe and Britain, but the Roman soldiers subjected to medical uses of the bulbs and sap might not have been so lucky. Every part of the bulb, foliage, and flower is toxic, which is why deer will not eat them. Even getting the sap on your hands can cause irritation. As cut flowers, they are also toxic to other flowers when combined in a vase because the milky sap interferes with water absorption and causes wilting. Daffodils need to be conditioned in a separate vase, with flower preservative, for 24 hours before adding to a bouquet. Stems should not be trimmed when changing the water and refreshing the flowers or the sap will be released again.

Keep an eye on small children around daffodils. Eating these flowers can cause vomiting, diarrhea, upset stomach, irritation of the mouth, and abdominal pain. Nevertheless, the use of daffodils survived ancient times to persist in folk medicine to treat burns, wounds, coughs, asthma, induce vomiting, or to ease joint pain (by making a plaster from the bulb), ***No scientific evidence supports any of this, and the practice of using daffodils as medicine can be dangerous.***

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learn more, the ADS provides authoritative information and help. This 501(c)(3) nonprofit, educational, charitable organization, founded in 1954, welcomes everyone from beginning gardeners to expert botanists. Its stated mission is "... to be an internationally recognized nonprofit association of individuals, organizations, companies, and/or universities dedicated to the encouragement of widespread interest in daffodils, and to research and education with respect to their culture, breeding, preservation, diseases, pests, testing and exhibition."

Four times a year, the American Daffodil Society publishes an 80-page magazine called *The Daffodil Journal* covering all aspects of growing and exhibiting. Members live in 47 states, organized into regions, and in countries around the world. For true daffodil enthusiasts, the many benefits of ADS membership, including a subscription to *The Daffodil Journal*, far outweigh the cost of the annual dues (\$30 at the individual level). The ADS manages several internet sites on different topics, such as its home page, library, discussion forums, data base, and more (all accessible from www.daffodilusa.org). However, Executive Director Frank Nyikos stresses that information can also be requested and received by mail. In fact, the majority of the organization's members are not using the internet. "We still have many ways to help disseminate information," he said. He shared some during our interview.

"Daffodils need 'full sun' locations in areas that have good drainage," Nyikos said. "This is advice for most daffodils. There are some (very few) that like wet feet. This isn't the norm. Some will grow in partial shade, though they don't bloom as well. The best way to grow daffodils is to make sure they don't have to compete with roots or ground cover."

The ADS suggests raised beds and hillsides as excellent locations, one of many tips offered to gardeners. In addition to joining ADS, a great way to expand your knowledge and connect with daffodil enthusiasts would be to attend daffodil shows or festivals and to tour display gardens. Unfortunately, many of these public events have been cancelled because of the Covid-19 pandemic, so be sure to check with organizers concerning their status. Local daffodils clubs offer in-person help. Clubs are also a good source for bulb catalogs, since people always have extra. If requesting a bulb catalog through the mail, (see sources at the end of this article) do so in late March or April. Make your selections and pay for your purchases from April through June. Compare prices, keeping in mind that bulbs priced very low may be smaller than more expensive ones and produce smaller flowers. The old saying "You get what you pay for" applies.

Choosing bulbs with sequential bloom times can extend your season of enjoyment. After ordering, you must be patient. Growers will ship your bulbs at the proper time for planting in your particular area, meaning when the soil temperature drops below 55°F. That could be as early as September in cool climates and as late November in warmer

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⬆️ Daffodil 'Apricot Whirl' is a lovely split-corona Narcissus with white petals topped by apricot ruffles. This eye catching flower stands 14 to 16 inches tall and blooms in early season. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs



⬆️ Narcissus 'Monal' is possibly the earliest and most colorful of the yellow-and-orange, large cupped daffodils. Often, this daffodil comes into full bloom when other daffodils are just revealing their buds. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs



⬆️ Narcissus 'Golden Harvest' is an old-timer (nearly 100 years old) but still remarkably vigorous with particularly long lasting flowers. The early-flowering daffodil is 16-inches tall. Deer and rodents leave daffodils alone because they contain a bitter toxic alkaloid called lycorine. Foraging animals know not to eat them. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs



⬆️ Narcissus 'Mount Hood' was introduced in the 1930s and is still the best known and most widely grown of the all-white trumpet daffodils. The flowers open creamy yellow and mature to an even creamy white. It is an early bloomer that stands 16-inches tall. Deer and rodents leave daffodils alone because they contain a bitter toxic alkaloid called lycorine. Available from Colorblends. Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs



⬆️ Narcissus 'Barrett Browning' is a longtime favorite, and voted one of the top 25 favorites by ADS members. It's an excellent naturalizer and performs well in the North and the South. Its small orange cup turns yellow at the center over time. No other early-blooming daffodil has this coloring. It grows 14 to 18 inches tall. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs



⬆️ Narcissus 'Erlicheer' is a double daffodil that blooms like mad in midseason, carrying 6 to 12 flowers per stem. The flowers are intensely fragrant, with a sweet scent. This longtime favorite was bred in New Zealand prior to 1934. It grows well in the South and on the West Coast, but is less suited to cold winter climates. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs

locations. Before good plant growth and flowering can occur in spring, the bulbs need a long period of cold and darkness underground, which is why they are generally planted in the fall. (Some fall-blooming types do exist.) Fortunately, in most of the U.S., temperatures get cold enough to grow daffodils, but in warmer climates, bulbs might need to be refrigerated before planting.

Prepare the area by spading to a depth of 12 inches and working in a complete, but low-nitrogen, fertilizer, such as 3-6-6 or 5-10-10 at the rate of about 1/4 cup per square foot. Bulbs should not come in direct contact with fertilizer. Phosphorus and potassium increase bulb health and improve flower quality but need to be in the soil in the planting hole, available for root development, as neither will percolate through the soil from above. Many people use bone meal as a source of phosphorous. Others discourage its use. Nyikos says to find a good supplier for bone meal to avoid plant health problems resulting from improperly prepared bones. Store it in a dry place. He suggests a triple phosphate fertilizer as a better choice.

The romantic vision of swaths of “naturalized” daffodils tempts gardeners to buy a variety of bulbs packaged together as a “naturalizing mixtures.” That sounds like a nice idea, but actually is not. Nyikos says, “Some cultivars multiply more quickly than others so that there is little variability in most mixes. Depending on the source, there is a better chance for

disease and pests. If you plan to ‘show’ your daffodils, you won’t be able to put a name to the bloom.”

Bulbs should be solid, feel heavy, and have no signs of injury to the basal plate—the bottom of the bulb where the roots emerge. You will get more and bigger blooms during the first season if you plant bulbs with twin tops, referred to as “double-nose.”

“Never, ever, ever plant a soft daffodil bulb,” Nyikos advises. “This is often the best indication of bulb rot. It can infect other daffodils you already have planted. You will not always see fuzzy fungus on the root end. Just don’t plant them.”

A soil thermometer is an inexpensive and worthwhile investment to make sure the temperature is below 55°F. Less bulb rot occurs in cool soil. Nyikos also recommends sprinkling the bulbs with a mycorrhizal inoculant containing the genus *Tricoderma*. Used as a bio-control agent, it feeds on predatory fungus. Viruses can also be a problem. Daffodils with the most common viruses will have streaked, rather than solid leaves. The virus enters every cell of the plant. The only way to kill it is to dig the bulbs and burn them. Never compost them. “Virused bulbs need to be destroyed completely in fire,” Nyikos said. “Most people just send them out with their household garbage. Virus can spread to all your daffodils, so don’t put this off.”

Bulb fly is a common pest. To combat it, you can examine your daffodils often after they have finished blooming. If you see the adult fly, you can capture and destroy it before it lays



Daffodil 'Gigantic Star' is a classic "big yellow daffodil." It is a Large Cup variety with huge flowers. It blooms in early season and the flowers are fragrant and long-lasting. This is an excellent variety for naturalizing and performs beautifully in both the North and the South. It grows 18- to 20-inches tall. Available from Colorblends.

Credit: Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs

eggs. Another good way to destroy bulb fly larva, as well as foliar nematodes (plant parasitic roundworms), is to soak bulbs in water heated to 112-120°F for three hours.

Plant your bulbs with the pointed end up at a depth of at least twice the height of the bulb or slightly deeper in sandy soil. Water well as soon as planted, and keep watering until you can rely on the fall rains. Once emerging leaf tips appear, top-dress with a 5-10-10 fertilizer, but when flowering begins, switch to 0-10-10 to avoid the nitrogen that would encourage foliage growth rather than flowers. Daffodils need plenty of water during their growth and bloom periods and for about three more weeks after flowering ends. At that point, quit watering and let the foliage dry. No matter how much you are tempted to tidy up your flower beds, do not cut back the foliage until it turns yellow. That could take until mid-summer. After removing it, lightly cultivate over the spot to prevent insects from traveling down the hole where the stem had been to access the bulb.

Bulbs can be left in the ground for several years, but a decline in the size and number of blooms means you should divide them. Dig and wash the bulbs, let them dry completely, and then hang them in mesh bags in a cool place with good air circulation until you are ready to replant in a new area once cool weather arrives in the fall.

HERE IS HOW TO CONTACT ADS:

American Daffodil Society

Attention: Frank Nyikos
8374 E State Rd 45
Unionville, IN 47468
812-360-6242

SOURCES FOR BULBS SELLING BY MAIL

If you request a catalog by phone or mail, also request an order blank. Or, you can simply list the items you want on a piece of paper. Personal checks are accepted.

Breck's

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Brent and Becky's Bulbs

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(will sell to homeowners)

In 1802, the English poet William Wordsworth gave the world its most famous poem about these beautiful flowers, titled simply *Daffodils*. It begins like this:

*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.*

More than two centuries later, we feel no less thrilled by such a sight as this. Brighten your life by exploring the fascinating world of daffodils. It will bring new friends, new knowledge, and pure joy as you watch them return each spring, *faithfully*.

Author Candace Brown would like to sincerely thank American Daffodil Society Executive Director Frank Nyikos for his gracious help in making this article possible. We would also like to thank Colorblends Wholesale Flowerbulbs for providing press photos.

McClure & Zimmerman

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