

STORY AND PHOTOS GAIL HUDSON

DAFFODILS



that turn

HEADS

Orange, pink and green are the new yellow.

Thrilling as it is to view “a crowd, a host of golden daffodils,” as described by 19th-century Romantic poet William Wordsworth, some daffodils you spot “fluttering and dancing in the breeze” this spring might not feature that hallmark yellow. Keep an eye out for orange to red and pink and maybe even green daffodils. You may spot some unique flower shapes, too—look for frothy doubles, swept-back outer petals (tepals) and split coronas (centers). The daffodils of 2024 are evolving beyond the traditional yellow or white varieties we all know and love.

This playful urge for change began back in the 1800s, as gardeners began to experiment with this popular spring flower. Today, more than 26,000 new varieties have been officially recorded. And for 35 years, Michael Berrigan of Oakdale, Minn., has been doing his part to add to that number.

“Daffodils have the most variety in floral form of any of our garden plants,” Michael says. “It’s always nice to see something bright and colorful in the early spring, especially in Minnesota.” Michael is one of only a dozen serious floral breeders across the U.S. who follow their passion to imagine and then create the newest daffodils under the sun.



TOP TO BOTTOM: 'Sabine Hay,' 'Ball of Fire,' 'Super Hero USA'



Labor of Loveliness

On a two-acre, gently sloping field in Elsworth, Wis., this corporate scientist for 3M decompresses from his day job by growing 2,000 to 4,000 daffodil seedlings every year. His collection greatly expanded in 2010 after renowned Minnesota daffodil breeder Dave Karnstedt passed away and left behind thousands of bulbs. Michael, his daughter and another daffodil enthusiast rescued 1,000 seedlings, which Michael now uses to make crosses.

He monitors the resulting flowers for four years. About 80 percent of them are rejected and composted. Of the remaining daffodils, Michael chooses his favorites. He has introduced 20 to 30 new varieties, such as ‘Myrna’s Sweet Max’ (2013) with white petals and a long pink cup and ‘Poe’ (2023) with white tepals and a cup edged in bright red.

A special plant for Michael is the all-orange daffodil he named ‘Warren Jay Enger’ (2022) in memory of the farmer who initially rented the field to him. In the daffodil world, Michael says an orange variety is “rare, rare, rare.” In fact, he only knows of two breeders in the world who’ve registered one.

“It’s a big flower, stands about knee high and is real bright,” he says. And he’s also trying to breed another rarity—a pink daffodil. “I want all pink, so all pink petals as well as a pink trumpet. There aren’t too many [of them],” Michael says. “The first one I ever saw was in 2003, and they told me I could have one bulb for a thousand dollars.”

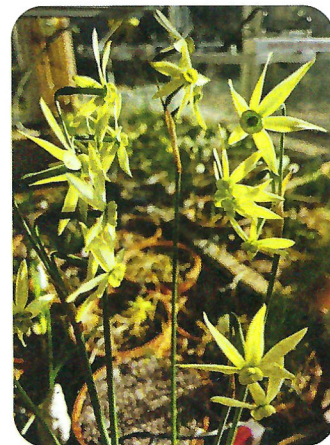


◀ CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: Poe daffodils; photo by Michael Berrigan. Planting bulbs near Elsworth, Wisc. Packaged green daffodil bulbs. Green daffodil seedlings; photos by Michael Berrigan.

Keen on Green

Green daffodils are another new frontier for breeders, and many are fragrant. ‘Emerald Kiss’ starts out greenish in color, fading to white as it ages. A California breeder produced ‘Green with Envy’ (2015), which has a deep, olive green cup surrounded by greenish yellow petals. Michael has several green seedlings in his greenhouse and hopes to use them in his daffodil breeding work.

If you’re anxious to grow one yourself, watch for New Zealand-bred ‘Polar Hunter’ (2020), a daffodil Michael says has “a greenish cast and wonderful fragrance.” Michael’s main quest? To breed early-blooming daffodils with large, showy, and more precise flowers. He plans to continue planting in his Wisconsin field, where he produces “bulbs the size of [his] fists.” Hopefully, we’ll see the fruits of his labor soon.



New Daffodils

It might be another decade before you can buy one of Michael's newly registered daffodils—probably through a specialty catalog at first. But gardeners can find plenty of exciting new varieties available today (see resources). "There are just so many different kinds," says Margaret Macneale, past president of the Minnesota Daffodil Society. She grows both new and historical varieties at her home in Golden Valley and says most daffodils available in our region are hardy to zone 3.

A few new showstoppers in her garden? 'Super Hero USA' (2007) is striking with pure white petals, vivid peach centers and strong, tall stems. 'Ball of Fire' (2010) sports a flashy mix of small yellow and orange petals within a large double yellow flower.

One of Margaret's mid-season bloomers, 'Drama Queen' (2000), has a split corona, meaning the primrose pink cup is divided and lays almost flat.

Margaret calls 'Ginter's Gem' (2013) a "cute, sweet flower" with a soft yellow color, multiple flowers and pendulous habit. It will increase in number (naturalize) if conditions are right.

Named after Margaret's mother who showed competition daffodils for many years, the 'Peggy Macneale' (2002) is a large-cupped, white beauty with a pale green eye.



TOP: 'Drama Queen'. BOTTOM: 'Peggy Macneale'

Join The American Daffodil Society

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LEARN to grow daffodils unique to your growing zone.
FIND sources of quality bulbs for shows and gardens.
ACCESS our family of websites to explore more about daffodils.



Friendships and mentoring are always in season
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Annual Membership:

Individual: \$35

Household: \$40



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Daffodil growing tips



Daffodils are an easy perennial spring flower to embrace and grow. Once you've found the right spot, planting them couldn't be simpler. And they can be left in the ground to flower year after year. Here's what you need to know.

BUY HEALTHY BULBS

Purchase bulbs from reputable companies, preferably in your part of the country. That way, they'll be much more likely to thrive in your conditions. For northern gardeners, bulbs that handle our frigid winter temperatures are best. If you're buying locally, check to see that the bulb is firm with a papery protective skin, not soft or moldy. Avoid bulbs with signs of disease or damage.

KNOW WHEN TO PLANT

Wait for the right conditions, Michael suggests. For our region, that means planting in late September to mid-October. He waits until the weather is cool, ideally 54 degrees Fahrenheit, to avoid *Fusarium* basal rot, a fungus at the base of the bulb, which can turn it to mush. The bulbs need to be watered and given time to root, preferably six weeks before the ground freezes. Covering the planting area with a bag of leaves or chopped straw helps.

NO BLOOMS?

If your daffodils aren't blooming, they're likely planted too densely, too deep or too close to a tree that's robbing them of sun and moisture. Daffodils need 4-6 hours of sun. Every six years, bulbs can be dug up after blooming, separated and then replanted immediately.

PLANT IN THE RIGHT PLACE

Don't plant at the bottom of a hill or slope. Look for good drainage in soil that crumbles easily, and don't plant too deep. Bulb growers from sandy Holland recommend a planting depth of 6 inches, but Minnesota breeder Michael Berrigan says that's too deep for Minnesota's heavier soils—the bulbs won't multiply. Instead, cover the top of the bulb with 1 to 2 inches of soil.

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The American Daffodil Society

Photos, care tips, free digital library
daffodilusa.org

Daffseek Database

Searchable for specific variety details
Daffseek.org

Minnesota Daffodil Society

Care tips, list of bulb suppliers for our northern climate, late-September bulb sale.
daffodilmn.org

To buy unusual varieties:

John Scheepers Bulbs

Bantam, CT
johnscheepers.com

Esker Farm Daffodils

Northern Ireland
eskerfarmdaffodils.com

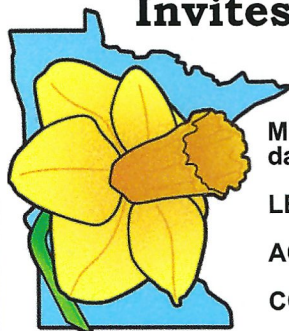
Brent and Becky's Bulbs

Gloucester, VA
brentandbeckysbulbs.com

Quality Daffodils USA

qdaffs.us

The Daffodil Society of Minnesota Invites You to Join Us!



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SOCIETY OF
MINNESOTA**



MEET local gardeners with a passion for daffodils.

LEARN to grow daffodils in cold climates.

ACCESS to daffodils not found in stores.

CONNECT with growers and hybridizers.

FIND reliable daffodil bulb sources.

RECEIVE periodic electronic newsletters.

PARTICIPATE in our annual daffodil show on May 4-5, 2024, at Bachman's on Lyndale.

All this for only \$5 per year!

Join us at <https://daffodilmn.org/join.htm>

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Visit our website at: <https://daffodilmn.org>