

HOME & GARDEN

Bet on spring bulbs

N. Ireland hybridizer to share expertise on daffodils, snowdrops

By Christine Arpe Gang
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Gardeners are perennially looking forward to the next season, the next new plant and the next project.

We often don't see the benefits of work done today until six months from now and that's especially true of planting bulbs in the fall for enjoyment next spring.

Thanks to the Mid-South Daffodil Society, you can learn about daffodils and snowdrops at 2

p.m. Sunday at the Dixon Gallery and Gardens when renowned daffodil hybridizer Brian Duncan presents a free slide lecture on the subjects.

Duncan, who is from Northern Ireland, is in town to attend and speak at a symposium held in conjunction with a board meeting of the American Daffodil Society, a rarefied group of about 60 experts and enthusiasts.

Then you can choose from 50 varieties of old favorites and new offerings at the sale put on by the local Daffodil Society from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. Nov. 1, also at the Dixon.

"All are tried and true for the Mid-South," said Vicki Duggins, president of the society.



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GREEN THUMB



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For great-looking daffodils next spring, purchase and plant bulbs now.

Because miniatures are so popular here, there are nine different types to choose from, including the popular Tete-a-Tetes but also Xit (pronounced "zit"), a daffie so white it appears to have blue undertones. It's in limited supply with only 10 bags of five bulbs each available at the sale.

Volunteers from the society recently held a "bagging party" where they transferred bulbs packed by wholesalers in bags of 100 and boxes of 250. They placed them in white paper bags containing five bulbs each. The small labeled bags will be displayed alphabetically for easy shopping.

Prices, which are less than high-quality online sources, range from \$2 for a bag of Baby Moon miniatures to \$10 for Xit. The society uses the money raised to stage its annual spring daffodil show and to bring in speakers to address area gardeners.

In the Mid-South, Thanksgiving weekend is often cited as the ideal time to plant daffodils, tulips and other spring-blooming bulbs. But because the bulbs at the sale are prechilled, it won't hurt to plant a few weeks early.

For the most visually pleasing display, plant bulbs in drifts, not straight rows. Dig holes in well-drained, sunny spots to a depth of 2 to 3 times the size of the bulbs. It's OK to plant under trees that shed their leaves

but not under evergreens.

Daffodils and other bulbs also perform well in containers provided they have a drainage hole and are two to three times as deep as the bulbs.

Put a thin layer of pea gravel on the bottom of the container, and put enough potting soil in to half-fill it. Place as many bulbs as possible in the soil without having them touch each other.

When mixing bulbs like daffodils, tulips and grape hyacinths, plant the largest bulbs near the bottom of the container and smaller ones on top with another layer of soil in between. Cover all of the bulbs with potting soil.

Put the pots outdoors on top of two bricks or some other device to make sure they drain freely.

It is easy for us to remember that Thanksgiving is the time to plant, but other signals indicate it's time to start digging when:

■ Fall foliage has moved just past peak.



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When mixing bulbs in a planter, always put smaller ones like muscari (also known as grape hyacinths) near the top, with a layer of soil between the small bulbs and larger ones.

■ Crickets no longer chirp.

■ Squirrels are digging in acorns as fast as they can.

■ You turn on the heater in your car.

■ Hostas start to lie down.

■ The dog moves from a cool spot in the yard to a sunny one.

INDOOR HYACINTHS

Because I like to force hyacinths into bloom in February, a time when I start to wonder if spring will ever arrive, I already bought some bulbs and am storing them in the refrigerator so they get their required chill time, about 10 to 12 weeks.

(Most bulbs are already

prechilled when they arrive in stores and do fine when planted outdoors in the ground or in containers. But if you want to hold them to force, they should be stored in the refrigerator away from fruits and vegetables.)

Forcing hyacinths is easy to do, especially if you have some of the glass vases designed for the task. A cupped portion at the top of the vase holds the bulb just above the water line where its roots will eventually wander.

They come in several colors and almost glow if placed on a window sill with the sun streaming through. They'll bring a smile to your face on a winter day.

