

CHARLES W. CULPEPPER

By WILLIAM O. TICKNOR, *Falls Church, Va.*

In the heart of Arlington, Va., among tall apartments and rows of houses, there are five and a half acres of lush, almost overgrown gardens. Birds abound, chipmunks are underfoot, and a great assortment of plant life flourishes. This is the home of Snow Gem, Red Sunrise and Charles W. Culpepper.

Finding Mr. Culpepper is a pleasure second only to talking to him. You pull into his driveway, walk down a lane that diverts into various paths, and as you look for him you enjoy the variety of his plantings and the evidences of his activities. Eventually you will find him as he works in his garden from dawn to dusk, rain or shine, almost every day of the year.

Mr. Culpepper is a native of Alabama, where in 1914 he was graduated from Alabama Polytechnic Institute (now Auburn University) with a major in botany. In 1918 he took a position with the U. S. Department of Agriculture and worked first in Washington and then for many years at Beltsville, Md. His special responsibility was fruit and vegetable preservation and quality control.

In 1924 he moved to his present location, at that time open farm-

land. Once, when admiring the daffodils of a friend, he was told to see Ed Powell in Silver Spring, Md. (See the article on Mr. Powell in THE DAFFODIL JOURNAL, Vol. II, No. 2.) Mr. Powell furnished him with bulbs, showed him how to cross-pollinate, imparted to him the love and lore of daffodils, and steered him in the direction of developing sturdy, beautiful American daffodils that do well in our climate and particular conditions. He attempted his first crosses in 1927, but secured no seed until the next year. Thirty-eight years later, with tireless optimism, he is still crossing hardy disease-resistant daffodils with the finest new varieties available.

He is a stern judge of his own seedlings and is slow to register them. Of the many thousands he has raised only two so far have passed his tests of disease resistance, reasonable increase, and beauty. The others have served as parents of future hopefuls, and thousands have gone to beautify gardens in the Washington area.

Mr. Culpepper's great prize is Snow Gem, registered in 1957, and described by Bill Pannill in the 1965 *RHS Daffodil and Tulip Yearbook* as a "very large, tall 3b red cup. The rounded snow-white petals and the small, red cup make this flower look like a giant *poeticus* and every bloom is virtually perfect." Grant Mitsch describes it as "A very attractive flower with pure white, rounded overlapping perianth and a brilliant orange red eye. This has much the appearance of a *poeticus* but is larger, earlier and more brilliant than most of the poets."

It was listed in the ADS Symposium as a top exhibition variety in 1962, 1963 and 1964, and as a top garden variety in 1962 and 1964. In my own experience, Snow Gem is outstanding in the garden, multiplies well and wins blue ribbons.

Red Sunrise, a 2a, was also registered in 1957. Grant Mitsch describes it as "one of the earliest to flower of the red cupped varieties, this has tall stems and large flowers of light yellow with quite large orange crowns. This should be a good cut flower variety." In my own experience it is prolific in increase and bloom. A bed of 18 bulbs planted in eastern North Carolina in 1962 produced 143 blooming sized bulbs in 1965. Its blooms, two months earlier, had showed no signs of being crowded. It is a non-fading long-lasting red cup that can be grown in full sun. While it does not have the grace of some exhibition varieties, it has greater value than many in the garden.

He plans to introduce "Golden Day," a large 1a of great vigor and size, with a beautifully shaped trumpet and fine golden color. It is a product of several generations and much selection in his garden. Its ancestry includes Powell seedlings, Statendam and Kingscourt. It

took a blue ribbon in the seedling classes for 1a's at the Washington Daffodil Society 1965 show.

Mr. Culpepper's first attempt to hybridize was in 1927, using Fortune, for which he had paid \$10 a bulb. In other early crosses he used Dick Wellband, Hades, Red Cross, Firetail, Lovenest and John Evelyn. The object of these crosses was to secure larger non-fading red-cupped flowers suited to the Washington area. About the time these seedlings came into bloom he began to make crosses using large yellow trumpet varieties including Statendam, Lord Wellington, Robert Sydenham and Dawson City. Later he made crosses among the white trumpet varieties, using Ada Finch, Kantara, Beer-sheba, Stresa and Mrs. Ernst H. Krelage. Daisy Schaffer, Gertie Millar and Mme. van Waveren were also used with the whites.

As his own seedlings came into bloom he used the best of these with the latest varieties that he could obtain. In 1956 he was given pollen from one of the first bulbs of Empress of Ireland to bloom in this country. He has continued to use Empress of Ireland since then and has used it with Chinese White, Olivet, and some of his own seedlings.

Mr. Culpepper's energy and interest are not entirely confined to



Charles W. Culpepper checking daffodil blooms in his gardens in Arlington, Va.

daffodils. His garden includes many rare and wonderful plants as well as the more commonplace. Beds or clumps of crinum, amaryllis and lycoris share sunny spots with chrysanthemums, iris and other perennials. Tomatoes, corn and annuals flourish over top of daffodils enjoying their summer rest. Little tags hanging from stalks are commonplace as he hybridizes also with iris, day lilies and amaryllis. He has worked with amaryllis (*hippeastrum*) as long as he has with daffodils. His aim with the amaryllis was to produce fine flowering varieties that would increase rapidly from offsets. He has largely achieved this with a number of varieties that increase as rapidly as do daffodils.

His garden is a mecca for persons wanting cut flowers, particularly arrangers who can find line material in his hollies, bamboo and foliage plants. In April he sells great quantities of daffodils to local florists, and as they prefer large yellow trumpets he has propagated his own seedling stocks for this demand.

One April a warm spell was followed by a long cold spell and that, in turn, by a sudden heat wave. All of Mr. Culpepper's daffodils came into bloom at one time, the early, the late, and the mid-season. It was a beautiful sight but a costly one.

Guy Wilson and Grant Mitsch have been to see his planting and Grant Mitsch retails both Snow Gem and Red Sunrise. Guy Wilson was intrigued by Mr. Culpepper's horticultural methods, such as raised beds and a summer leaf mulch, and commented that this was not needed in Ireland's milder climate. Mr. Culpepper uses it as an antidote for hot moist soil so encouraging to basal rot.

On April 26, 1965, disaster struck Mr. Culpepper. A piece of wire wrapped around him as he gardened and his leg was broken above the knee. While friends gathered his seeds for him and performed the absolute necessities of his garden Mr. Culpepper went through what must have seemed to a man of his intense activity a slow convalescence. He has missed a year of gardening but his spirit and plans are undaunted, and he plans new crosses and other activities for next year. Before his accident he had as usual made many crosses. Seed set in great quantities with *Festivity* as a parent.

It is a most satisfying experience to be a gardening acquaintance of Mr. Culpepper. He is always busy but never too busy to stop and chat, and his long years of gardening and his horticultural background have given him an immense knowledge of plant life. Advice is seldom offered but given freely when asked for, either in botanical terminology or in common language, whichever you prefer. The Greeks said the best schooling was for a student to sit on a log with Plato. I prefer to squat by a daffodil bed with Mr. Culpepper.