

# CRAZY OVER DAFFODILS

Palm Beach man has created 186 named varieties

**By Heather Graulich**  
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Maybe, in a former life in New England or New York, you spent winters cozying up to bulb catalogs, choosing your favorite daffodils and then waiting like a child for them to spring from the cool earth, knowing they'd be the first bright thing to grace the garden.

If so, you should probably thank William Gordon Pannill.

Pannill, a Palm Beach resident, is considered one of the country's leading amateur experts in daffodil hybridization. Over the past 40 years, he has created 186 named varieties of daffodils, all registered with the Royal Horticultural Society. A number of his bulbs are sold commercially through catalogs.

And last week, he received the Garden Club of America's Natalie Peters

Webster Medal for "finding unusual plant material, encouraging its creative use and assuring its availability."

That last bit is the important part for daffodil lovers. Pannill assures daffodil availability by refusing to sell the new varieties he creates. Instead, like a Johnny Daffodilseed, he gives them away to bulb companies to propagate, hoping to spread the joy.



**Pannill**

He certainly doesn't need the wealth.

"(Sharing) makes me happy and proud," says Pannill, who once owned a company that made sweatshirts for names such as Hanes and Champion.

Now retired, Pannill splits his time between Palm Beach and North Carolina — not counting the few weeks each year he spends at a home in Virginia, where he has devoted the grounds to daffodils.

"In late March I go to Virginia during the blooming season," Pannill says. "I take them to shows and do my hybridizing."

(The shows are another reason Pannill doesn't sell his daffodils — selling would make him a professional and professionals can't enter garden shows.)

Pannill returns to Virginia in June to collect the daffodils' seeds and start new bulbs. He grows hundreds of seeds just to get the few daffodils that meet his standards.

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# Sharing daffodils makes grower happy and proud

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## DAFFODILS

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"It takes six years for a seed to bloom," he says. "Every year they come up a little bigger as the bulb grows until it's the size of a fist. Then you get a bloom."

Pannill has always loved gardening, but his passion for daffodils came after getting bit by the blue ribbon bug.

"My late wife belonged to a garden club in Virginia, and one year she brought home eight bulbs and I grew them," he says. "Someone said I should enter the flowers in a show and I won six blue ribbons. Six years later, I was president of the American Daffodil Society.

"I'd always wanted to be great

at something."

As for his favorite daffodils, they aren't even yellow.

"My best ones are all white," he says. "They're large and totally white. And I have them with a white petal and pink cup, and white with red."

He's especially proud of a white and yellow daffodil called Intrigue he bred 30 years ago. It is still sold in catalogs, popular for its multi-blossomed stems and sweet fragrance.

As for daffodils' fleeting presence in the garden, well, that's part of their charm, Pannill says.

"They're the first things that bloom and everyone's so happy to see them after a gloomy winter," he says. "But they only last a few weeks. You don't get sick of them."