

Gardening

Dabbling in Daffodils at Descanso

By ELIZABETH CHRISTIAN

Anyone who has traveled to the Pacific Northwest in spring has seen one of the region's most glorious sights—huge yellow daffodils, thousands of them, glowing like the fog as if lighted from within. Many Southern Californians have come home from such trips eager to grow those splendid flowers in their gardens. Come fall, they rush out, buy two dozen of the King Alfred bulbs they saw blooming in such profusion in Washington and Oregon, plant them and wait for success. And they're almost invariably disappointed.

Not only are the blossoms not as spectacular here, the King Alfred usually performs well only during the first year it's planted.

"If you're happy with the King Alfred's blossoms that first year, be

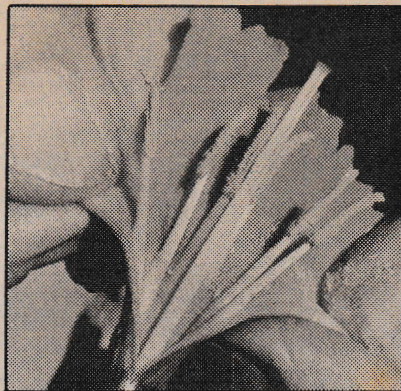
Beginning this weekend, Robert Maas' column can be found every Sunday with other gardening features in the newly expanded Real Estate section of The Times.

satisfied and throw out the bulbs," says Polly Anderson, a lifelong gardener and a founding member of the Southern California Daffodil Society. "However, part of [the society's] ambition is to find varieties that do well in Southern California—and that means ones that will naturalize."

This weekend at Descanso Gardens, you'll have the opportunity to see daffodils that *do* do well in Southern California; so well, in fact, that they will often naturalize—in other words, make themselves right at home in your garden and come back year after year without much effort on your part.

Anderson, who is an expert on creating new strains through cross-pollination, says Peeping Tom and February Gold are daffodils that do particularly well in this area. Both are yellow and both have blooms on the small side.

"The white ones, in general, don't do as well here as the yellow



Cross-pollination: pollen covering stamens, in cross section shown left, are transferred to style of another variety, right.



CON KEYES / Los Angeles Times



Polly Anderson of Southern California Daffodil Society.

ones, but the blends of yellow and white do fine," she says.

She suggests planting the bulbs in a sunny location in September or October. Set them six to eight inches deep and add a good, low-nitrogen granulated fertilizer to the planting hole. Then water the bed moderately but regularly. You won't see their sunny faces until early spring.

"When the green spikes peek out of the ground, begin watering heavily," Anderson says. "It's really hard to over-water when daffodils are in their fast-growing and blooming stages." Give them another good feeding when they begin to grow.

Then, enjoy. With luck and a

little cold weather, you'll have blooms for weeks.

After the blossoms are gone, let the greens rest until they bend over and lose all traces of green. When they're completely brown, cut them off at ground level and resume a light watering schedule.

Daffodils like the company of other plants in the garden and don't mind poking up through annuals. "A lot of old-timers plant the daffodils right in their lawns, where they'll naturalize. Then they just leave them there," Anderson says. "We even know one fine grower who lets the weeds grow around his daffodils as a natural mulch, which he doesn't pull until the blossoms are gone."

Wide Selection of Bulbs

Local nurseries typically have a good selection of daffodil bulbs on hand during planting season—but, again, don't be hoodwinked by the spectacular photos on the King Alfred boxes. You might also want to write for a catalogue from Grant Mitsch Novelty Daffodils, P.O. Box 218, Hubbard, Ore. 97032—you'll see varieties that never are available through retail outlets here, and the catalogue does note which strains are well-suited for Southern California.

The daffodil, like the jonquil, is a member of the narcissus group and all are part of the amaryllis family; many members of the family thrive in Southern California. Anderson is particularly fond of the paper-white narcissus, which smell divine and naturalize beautifully. Because of our cool February, many narcissus are still in bloom, and some will be on display during the competi-

Weekend Checklist for Diggers and Planters

For dedicated gardeners, here are suggestions from the California Assn. of Nurserymen:

□ Prune fuchsias, pelargoniums and geraniums now for fuller plants with more flowers.

□ Protect newly planted annuals from the onslaught of snails and slugs. Be generous and make regular applications of bait throughout the flower bed.

□ If the weather in your area permits, get your vegetables in as soon as possible and extend your harvest by planting at two- to three-week intervals.

□ Consider planting tuberous begonias soon. Their large, colorful flowers will dazzle you this summer.

□ Keep a lookout for aphids on your roses and keep them in check.

□ Prune wisteria heavily after it finishes blooming this spring.

□ If you have a notion to move any azaleas or camellias, now is the time. Dig them up and replant in a new spot in richly prepared soil and keep thoroughly watered.

tion at Descanso Gardens.

The Southern California Daffodil Society Competition, today from 1:30 to 4 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. at Descanso Gardens in La Cañada Flintridge, will feature 200-300 different kinds of daffodils, from old favorites such as Tete-a-Tete, a miniature yellow trumpet, to strains so new that you won't find them in any catalogue. Although there is no additional fee for viewing the competition, general admission to the gardens is \$3; seniors 62 and older and students with ID \$1.50; children 5-12, 75 cents; 4 and younger are free.

A number of classes on growing the daffodils, including sessions on cross-pollination, will be featured throughout the two-day competition.

Christian is a Times copy editor.