Daffodil—Trumpeter of Spring and Bulb of the Year for 2017

Stopping to smell the flowers
By Arlene Marturano

Each new year the National Garden Bureau, a non-profit organization dedicated to educating and motivating the public to increase their use of plants in homes, gardens, and the workplace, selects one annual, perennial, bulb, and edible to showcase in “The Year of the...” series. The plant selections must match four criteria: easy to grow and to propagate, adaptable and durable in a variety of growing conditions, genetically diverse, and versatile in the landscape.

The enduring, adaptable, low-maintenance, and pest resistant daffodil is the bulb of the year for 2017. Take a look in your garden, and you will find the green leaf tips peeking up. In some areas of Columbia, paperwhites, Narcissus papyraceus, are in full bloom. Narcissus is the botanical or genus name, and daffodil is the common name.

Daffodils, spring-flowering, self-propagating perennials, are native to the meadows and forests of the Mediterranean basin. After being introduced to British gardens in the 1500s, daffodils eventually came to North America in the skirts of colonial women who sewed dormant bulbs into the hems to transport them to new homeland gardens.

Remnant ancestors of these bulbs persist today in older gardens of the east coast. The American
Daffodil Society uses the Royal Horticulture Society system of classification of daffodils to this day.

Old House Gardens, an heirloom bulb nursery, recommends planting daffodil bulbs in fall in well-drained soil and full to partial sun. Daffodils are not fertilizer dependent and do not require mushroom compost or a manure rich diet. Fertilize lightly in fall with a low nitrogen fertilizer.

Daffodil 'Dutchmaster 2' from American Meadows, Inc.

A second fertilizer application in February helps feed bulbs after bloom. After spring bloom, remove spent flowers but let leaves yellow and die back completely before cutting back. Leaves feed the bulb for next year's bloom.

Pests like deer and rodents are not usually a problem with daffodils because the bulbs and foliage are poisonous. However, automatic irrigation systems are a problem for the bulbs since they contribute to fungal growth and bulb rot. Manual irrigation of bulbs is recommended if rain is irregular.

Generally, daffodils do not need dividing annually, but if decreased bloom indicates overcrowding, dig and divide after foliage yellows.

Daffodil 'Rapture' trumpets in spring.

We've touched upon the science of daffodils but need poets like Wordsworth to capture the aesthetics of the trumpeter of spring.

I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd,
A host, of golden daffodils;
Beside the lake, beneath the trees,
Fluttering and dancing in the breeze.
Continuous as the stars that shine
And twinkle on the milky way,
They stretched in never-ending line
Along the margin of a bay:
Ten thousand saw I at a glance,
Tossing their heads in sprightly dance.
The waves beside them danced; but they
Out-did the sparkling waves in glee:
A poet could not but be gay,
In such
a jocund company: I gazed— and gazed— but little thought What wealth the show to me had brought: For oft, when on my couch I lie In vacant or in pensive mood, They flash upon that inward eye Which is the bliss of solitude; And then my heart with pleasure fills, And dances with the daffodils.

Spring Daffodil Displays

• Biltmore Estate in Asheville, N.C. • Carolina Children’s Garden • Colonial Williamsburg, Va. • Gibbs Garden, Ball Ground, Ga. • Gloucester Daffodil Festival, Va. • Riverbanks Botanical Garden

Paperwhites in bloom in December along Rosewood Drive

Daffodil 'Tahiti' available at Brent and Becky’s Bulbs

Daffodil 'Geranium' from Brent and Becky’s Bulbs