

Delightful Daffodils

by Barbara Perry Lawton

When the daffodils begin to poke their noses up in our beds and borders, we know the glories of spring will soon be with us. And this spring in St. Louis, April 6 through 10, daffodils will be getting even more than their usual share of attention: The 10th World Daffodil Convention is being held in St. Louis and promises to attract daffodil enthusiasts from around the world (see page 6). There will be thought-provoking presentations and tours, all with daffodil themes.

Daffodils, bulbs of the genus *Narcissus*, are native mainly to southwestern Europe. There are many different types of daffodils. There are some 50 to 100 species and, unbelievably, more than 25,000 daffodil cultivars, mostly developed in the British Isles. The Royal Horticultural Society of England has established twelve horticultural divisions of daffodils, based on the physical characteristics of each group. The Dutch are second only to the English in the world's production of daffodils.

THE DAFFODIL WORLD OF ST. LOUIS

Here in St. Louis, we are fortunate to have Jason Delaney, an acknowledged daffodil expert, on staff at our Missouri Botanical Garden. Some 20 years ago when he was in high school, Jason visited the Garden and realized that some of the daffodils were mislabeled—his knowledge of daffodils already was impressive. His professional ambitions were born on that



Jason's 'Orpha'

visit—and he hoped to correct the Garden's daffodil collections.

A few years after that, he got an internship at the Garden and, upon completing his degree in horticulture, he was hired full-time. There were fewer than two dozen daffodil varieties when Jason first joined Missouri Botanical Garden. Today there are about 600, mainly due to his efforts. Now 35, Jason has come a long way—he currently is supervisor of the North Gardens as well as the bulb collection specialist. He began

breeding daffodils in 2002 and has a few of exhibition quality in his collection. His finest to date is one dubbed 'Orpha,' named for his cat.

Jason has earned his spurs in the daffodil world, having served two terms as president of the Greater St. Louis Daffodil Society, and two terms on the board of the American Daffodil Society. He also was chairman of the 51st annual National Daffodil Convention held in St. Louis in 2005.

THE ABCs OF GROWING DAFFODILS

Growing daffodils ideally begins with a rich loamy soil that drains well and has a pH of about 6.5 to 7.0. The location should be sunny during the blooming season. Choose fat, firm, large bulbs that promise to produce many flowers. You'll be happy to note that deer and rodents do not eat daffodils.

Ideally, you should plant daffodils in the fall before the first hard freeze. Planting later probably will result in later blooms as well as shorter stems. The rule of thumb for planting depth is that you should plant bulbs at a depth that is about three times the height of the bulb. This means that big daffodil bulbs should be planted at a depth of about nine inches. Use a balanced fertilizer such as Bulb Booster or other fertilizers that are formulated especially for bulbs. Follow the directions on the package.

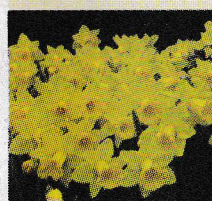
Handy hints: Mark where you plant daffodils so that you don't dig them up by mistake when planting other ornamentals. Don't plant daffodils in rows like military formations. Planting them in drifts and swaths is far more effective.

KEEP THE PARTY GOING ALL SUMMER!



Jason's Top Ten

Missouri Botanical Garden's Jason Delaney gave us his 10 favorite daffodils for the St. Louis area, including the Cultivar name, classification and brief attributes.



'Marieke' (Trumpet). Classic golden yellow, thrives in our climate, perennializing better than any other all-yellow trumpet daffodil. Nice fragrance.

'Classic Garden' (Trumpet). Golden-yellow petals and a rich orange-red trumpet. Superb perennializer, floriferous, consistent, and showy.



'Pink Charm' (Large-cupped). Possibly the best commercial "pink" daffodil for St. Louis. Lots of flowers with a rosy-pink ruffled white cup.

'Ice Follies' (Large-cupped). One of the most widely-grown daffodils. Weatherproof, early, long-lasting, perennial, and strongly floriferous.



'Barrett Browning' (Small-cupped). Early and tall, with creamy white petals framing a brightly colored orange cup. Strongly perennial and floriferous.

'Tahiti' (Double). Soft yellow and red, hands-down the best double daffodil for St. Louis. "blast-resistant", strongly perennial, and quite floriferous with strong stems.



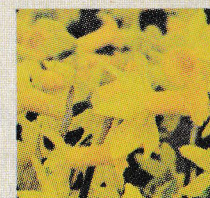
'Geranium' (Tazetta). Heady fragrance, multiple stems per bulb, multiple florets p e r s t e m ,

with cheery white-petaled, orange-cups.



'Actaea' (Poeticus) The

classic "pheasant's eyes" daffodil, or "poet's daffodil". Sweetly fragrant, late-flowering, and graceful.



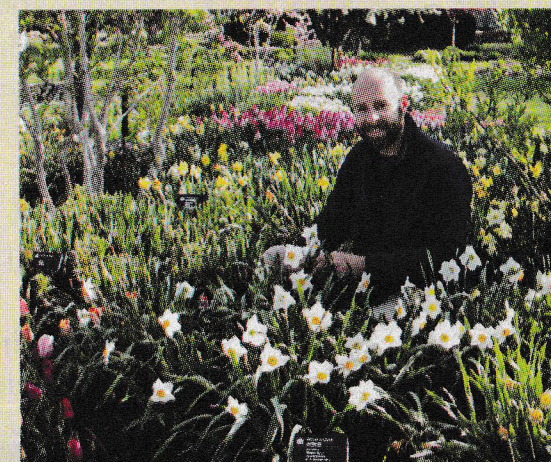
'Tweety Bird' (Cyclamineus). Strongly perennial, floriferous, early, bold, and dramatic.

'Pink Wonder'

(Split-corona). Clean "pink" corona against white petals. A bit later to flower; consistent and a strong grower and perennializer.



photos courtesy John Scheepers and Van Engelen Bulbs



Barbara Perry Lawton is a writer, author, speaker and photographer. She has served as manager of publications for Missouri Botanical Garden and as weekly garden columnist for the Post-Dispatch. The author of a number of gardening and natural history books, and contributor to many periodicals, she has earned regional and national honors for her writing and photography. Barbara is also a Master Gardener and volunteers at MBG.



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