





Faith in a Flower

When the daffodils swarm in New Hampshire, spring and hope officially sprout anew for one passionate gardener.

Dianne Mrak was not prone to succumb to “yellow fever.” She pooh-poohed the loudly hued, blaring citron-colored narcissus that we usually associate with spring. So she was scarcely listening when a fellow teacher invited her to tag along to a daffodil show years ago. But when the friend dangled the promise of pink daffodils, her curiosity was piqued. Little did she know one day her cottage garden would be filled with them.

When a doubtful Dianne agreed to attend that show with her friend in Baltimore, sure enough, she saw daffodils with a decidedly pink tint and that color anomaly cemented her romance with spring for the next half century. Dianne started with just a handful of pink daffodils in front of her apartment and steadily increased over the years as she and husband Bob moved throughout the country. The daffodils always tagged along—even when they called steamy Georgia home. Dianne became active in the Georgia Daffodil Society and coincidentally they decided to open a school for daffodil judges. To become a judge, she needed to grow one hundred varieties, which increased her baggage considerably as the family constantly relocated. Always, the emphasis was on the pink end of the spectrum—from miniatures to large-cups—that make up the narcissus clan.



Eventually, Dianne increased her scope to include toned-down lemon hues, orange, peach, cream, white, rose pink, and red. As she puts it, "You just fall in love."

So when they moved to the 1790 cottage in Dover, New Hampshire, daffodils were definitely in the old Cape's future. By that time, she'd amassed over a thousand daffodils for their mid-November moving day. Due to the vast numbers, she installed an army of narcissus in field rows across the road from the quaint historic home they had purchased. "But I don't consider that to be a real garden," she quickly adds. However, a full-fledged garden with all the bells, whistles, and brickwork soon sprang up around the cottage.

Then disaster struck. In July of 2006, the house caught on fire when a fierce coastal wind blew a lamp over. Dianne and Bob managed to escape with only Bob's briefcase in hand. Ten days later, Dianne was back digging the charred soil, trying to salvage her garden. "Maybe twenty percent of the daffodils around the house survived," she says. Fortunately, the field across the street was unscathed. The couple courageously rebuilt their cottage with every detail authentic to the original era of the house, and Dianne replaced her garden—brick by brick and bulb by bulb. "A garden is not just one season," Dianne says. She put in trees and shrubs, interplanting with rescued daylilies that miraculously survived the fire. But she also doubled her daffodil efforts, knowing that spring was when the garden reaches its zenith. And the following spring was like a rebirth for the Mraks.







Now, the neighborhood has an open invitation. On Mother's Day weekend, everyone converges on Dianne's garden to witness the moment when the chill is officially vanquished and spring in full throttle. With the discerning eye of an official judge, Dianne has collected the finest daffodils in creation, and the garden serves as a showcase. Particularly keen on scent, she added jonquils, tazettas, poeticus, and ultra-aromatic doubles to the display. From the earliest little cyclamineus types with their small, rocket-like flowers to the larger late types, the Mrak daffodil drama can span twelve weeks in a cool season, although nine weeks of glory is the norm. Simultaneously, flowering cherries, magnolias, dogwoods, and forsythias reach their crescendo and the little cottage that the Mraks rebuilt proudly wades in its sea of color as a defiant testimony to one gardener's undying faith in daffodils. ■

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