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## On Gardening: Glorious geophytes daffodils deserve to be in your garden



The bright yellow daffodils 'King Alfred.' (Tom Karwin — Santa Cruz Sentinel)

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Right now is a good time of the year to plant spring-flowering bulbs. There are many available varieties for venturesome gardeners to consider, and we regularly recommend trying unfamiliar botanical treasures. Today's column features daffodils, which could well be the most popular and most frequently hybridized of the geophytes.

Here are some reasons for including daffodils in your garden.

## **Really Beautiful**

Many flowers are delightful in the garden, and many gardeners have their favorites, but just about everyone enjoys daffodils, especially when they declare the arrival of the spring season. Daffodils have graceful stems, attractive foliage, and unique blossoms. Trumpet daffodils, the most familiar division within the genus *Narcissus*, have blossoms that feature the trumpet-shaped corona surrounded by six petal-like tepals, which form the perianth. The corona and perianth might have the same color or different colors.

## **Numerous Hybrids**

A very large and growing number of hybrid daffodils are available through garden centers and mail-order nurseries. Many plants are yellow or white, or combinations of those colors; hybridizers have introduced cultivars with green, pink, orange and red elements. There are interesting and pleasing color combinations for various tastes.

The growing number of hybrids includes variations of shapes, particularly in the coronas that might be single or double in form, or might have ruffled or frilly edges.

There are also varieties that bloom in at various times, as early as late December and as late as early, mid- or late spring, so with a little planning you can create an extended display.

## **Perennialize Themselves**

During their growing season, many hybrid daffodil bulbs form side bulbils that develop new bulbs and provide more flowers in the following season. A clump of daffodils will increase in size from one season to the next. In time, the clump can become crowded, and the gardener can dig up the bulbs for replanting over a larger area, or gift them to friends.

## Naturalize Themselves

Some varieties will develop seeds and sow them naturally to form additional populations of plants. Over a few seasons, they can spread throughout a meadow area, providing a stunning display.

## Free of Pests and Diseases

The bulbs and foliage of daffodils are poisonous to most pests because all parts of the plant include the toxic chemical, lycorine. Consequently, the plants have minimal problem with deer, gophers or other rodents. If such pests tend to favor your garden, daffodils will provide a fine display without the expectation that plants will disappear when you're not looking.

Daffodils are not immune to diseases, and basal rot and fungi could attack the plants, as well as nematodes, bulb flies, or viruses. However, plants grown in good soil with good drainage, and regular care generally will resist such difficulties. The references listed below include helpful information about managing such problems.

## Easy to Plant

Daffodil bulbs are planted three times the width of the bulb apart, three times the width of the bulb deep. They can be planted singly, with a trowel or other tool, or in groups by removing the desired amount of soil from the planting area, positioning the bulbs, then replacing the soil. Each gardener has a favorite planting method. In any case, planting a large number of daffodil bulbs can be accomplished quickly.

For more information, visit the websites of the [American Daffodil Society](#) or England's [The Daffodil Society](#).

## Multiple Sources

Daffodil bulbs will be available now, and through most of the fall months from local garden centers and several mail-order nurseries. Several mail order nurseries throughout the United States will offer daffodil bulbs. An Internet search for "daffodil bulbs" will list several sources.

Many gardeners will favor west coast suppliers on the premise that they grow their bulbs under conditions like those of the local area. Here are several suppliers from this part of the country:

- Roozengaarde Display Gardens, Mount Vernon, Washington
- Grant Mitsch Novelty Daffodils, Hubbard, Oregon
- Cherry Creek Daffodils, Sherwood, Oregon
- Nancy Wilson Species and Miniature Narcissus, Garberville, California

Finally, I will list Brent and Becky's Bulbs, located in Gloucester, Virginia, not the West Coast. This family business began in the early 1900s as a daffodil specialist and has since grown to offer over 1,000 varieties of bulbs. Daffodils continue to be their favorite product, and they offer many beautiful cultivars. Their website also offers solid advice on cultivation. Click on the menu for "Media."

If you don't already have daffodils in your garden, this is the time to select and order cultivars that speak to you and plant the bulbs in preparation for a delightful display in the spring.

*Tom Karwin is president of the Monterey Bay Area Cactus & Succulent Society, past president of the Friends of the UC Santa Cruz Arboretum, and a Lifetime UC Master Gardener (Certified 1999–2009). Visit [ongardening.com](http://ongardening.com) for links to examples of the aloe categories described in this column, and send comments or questions to [gardening@karwin.com](mailto:gardening@karwin.com).*

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