

INGREG'S GARDEN

A FIELD OF DREAMS

If you've kept up with my writing over the years, you know that I love heirloom bulbs. Not only are they beautiful, but they also don't require water, fertilizer, pesticides or division. You also know that I generally go "whole hog" into my endeavors. Several of my colleagues have accused me in the past of being "overly focused." I don't deny that. I wholeheartedly admit that I'm focused on planting daffodils, jonquils and narcissus, and plan to be until the day that I die. When I lay out a plan I want it finished, no matter how long it takes, and I want it to be perfect, no matter what it costs. And when I sample ice cream I want to try all 36 flavors and then eat the whole carton of the one that I like the best!

I was inspired by heirloom bulbs years ago when I was puttering around long-abandoned old homeplaces on properties my family owns in rural East Texas. It's very common in much of Texas for these old sites to be marked by surviving bulbs — daffodils, jonquils, narcissus, crinum, spider lilies, snowflakes, amaryllises, rain lilies and other enduring floral soldiers. These hallowed garden grounds often remain host to old crapemyrtles and antique roses, as well.

But it was the genus *Narcissus* that first grabbed my soft heart because they were so bright, cheery and fragrant as well as easy to divide and propagate. Although the old clumps often contained up to a hundred bulbs, I always put the biggest and best ones right back where they came from as if they were as important and sacred as tombstones to me. I was happy just having a few until I saw several spectacular sites that literally

changed my life. First there was Cousin Celia's expansive and incredibly beautiful collection that she inherited from her grandmother and expanded to multiple acres over the years. After my first visit there, I truly knew what heaven looked like. Then there was old Mr. Butler's place hidden in the woods where he spent a lifetime purchasing leftover bulbs at garden centers, then dividing and covering the property with those that grew well. It was a sight to behold.

Finally there was Thera Lou Adams' labor of love near Dodson, Louisiana. Her magical field was

set in motion by her late husband Henry, who (like me) started dividing and planting surviving heirloom bulbs around his family's old homeplace in central Louisiana. And when I say "labor of love," I mean it. For when Thera Lou's husband died, she grabbed the shovel and in his memory picked up right where he left off. She went on to cover four acres with a breathtaking collection of daffodils, jonquils and narcissus. Some of you virtual gardeners may not appreciate the effort and commitment it takes to cover four acres, one bulb at a time, but I certainly do because I'm attempting to do



Photos: Greg Grant

Pines and a lone peach form the perfect backdrop for Thera Lou's spring show.

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IN GREG'S GARDEN



Thera Lou and Greg share a love of both birds and bulbs. A large pecan tree still marks the old homestead (above). First introduced in 1927, 'Carlton' (below) is one of Thera Lou's most prolific daffodils.



the same thing on four different properties.

I've been working on my projects for a quarter of a century and I still don't have anything that looks like hers! I used to try to plant 1,000 bulbs each year, but after all my surgeries I now aim for 100. And I live less than a mile from my projects. Thera Lou lives in another state! You read that correctly. The amazing and effervescent Thera Lou Adams lives in Camden, Arkansas, and over the years has faithfully tended and expanded her late husband's bulbs at his family's old homestead. The rest of us can only wish we were that focused and dedicated. When I die, my family will probably scrape my properties and sell the topsoil! Let's just hope my ashes are elsewhere.

You will probably never meet Thera Lou, so let me do my best to describe her. You already know she's as hard working and driven as any on the planet. But she's also sweet, caring, giving and funny. I do love funny. She also likes to learn about new things and new plants. So naturally she ordered every daffodil imaginable to add to her field of dreams in rural Louisiana.

In case I haven't reminded you lately, daffodils are fairly large flowers with big trumpet noses and little fragrance. They are generally yellow but can be white or bi-colored. Jonquils have clusters of small, sweetly scented yellow flowers. And narcissus boast clusters of overbearingly scented white flowers. I like their obnoxious fragrance (they remind me of me!), but many others don't. Technically these are all in the genus *Narcissus*. Although the American Daffodil Society (daffodilusa.org) calls them all daffodils and divides them into 14 different groups, I'll forever remain in a narcissistic stupor and lump my old friends into three down-to-earth camps.

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If by chance you ever get to see Thera Lou's field, you will see all of the above-mentioned *Narcissus*, and even more. There are old heirlooms like Lent lily, 'Sweetie,' 'Butter and Eggs' and 'Texas Star' scattered among standards like 'Carlton' and 'Ice Follies.' Tucked in here and there are Thera Lou's modern showgirls such as 'Las Vegas' and 'Ambergate.' Yep, the gaudy girls dance hand in hand with the country gals.

Thera Lou Adams truly is a gardening angel, for every spring she opens her H. Nelton Adams Memorial Daffodil Field to the public for a free three-day weekend of picnicking, smiles and photographs. It's very hard to predict when *Narcissus* will be in peak bloom in the mid-South, but it's generally around late February or the first of March. There are usually numerous announcements on the Internet giving the days and time each year.

If you happen to be in that direction (the middle of nowhere, about 40 miles south of Monroe, Louisiana) during her open weekend (March 4-6, 2016), the GPS address across the road is 680 North Louisiana 34, Dodson, Louisiana 71422. If not, enjoy my photographs and appreciate, as I do, the undying love Thera Lou Adams shares for her late husband, gardening and the lasting beauty of bulbs. TG

RESOURCES

For more information on naturalized heirloom bulbs:

Daffodils in American Gardens by Sara Van Beck (The University of South Carolina Press)

Daffodils in Florida: A Field Guide to the Coastal South by Linda and Sara Van Beck (Van Beck)

The Bulb Hunter by Chris Wiesinger and William C. Welch (Texas A&M University Press)



A simple sign (above) marks Thera Lou's labor of love in rural Louisiana. Thera Lou Adams (below) can always be counted on for a basket of bulbs and a bundle of energy.

