

In bloom: A look at Joe Hamm's daffodil gardens

Natalie Reid Miller, *Observer-Reporter*, April 12, 2018



Joe Hamm has been collecting daffodils for almost three decades, but still gets a thrill when the spring perennials are in bloom.



"It's exciting," said Hamm. "I like to see the expressions on people's faces when they see the flowers."



Flowers bloom at Joe Hamm's Daffodil Gardens, one of two displays recognized by the American Daffodil Society in Pennsylvania.

The retired interior designer has a two-acre hortus – a collection of plants for display and preservation – on his 16.5-acre farm in Buffalo Village, Hopewell Township. Open to the public into the first week of May, the collection is one of 26 display gardens of the American Daffodil Society, and one of only two in the state.

Hamm, who inherited a love of gardening from his grandfather, has a collection of about 2,000 cultivars and more than 30,000 blooms, including historic varieties registered prior to 1940. His oldest is a Van Sion that dates to 1667. But don't ask him to pick a favorite.

"The one I'm holding in my hand, that's my favorite," he said with a laugh. "I couldn't pick one and say that's my favorite. It's like picking a favorite child."



Joe Hamm holds a tag that identifies the type of daffodil. Hamm's collection includes about 2,000 types of the flower.

Hamm was born in Pittsburgh and moved to Indianapolis, Ind., in 1960. When he retired in 2000, he started making plans to move his collection to Western Pennsylvania. It took him a while to find the perfect property, though, so he moved thousands of bulbs to a friend's farm in Hickory before transferring them to his Hopewell

Township farm.

Hamm focused on daffodils because they're easy to grow, he said.

“Deer don’t eat them. I used to battle deer in Indiana,” he said. “Iris, hostas, day lilies...You can spray deterrents on the plants, but as soon as they start blooming, the deer would start eating the buds. Hostas are a big salad for them.”

When Hamm started his daffodil collection, around 1990, he was overwhelmed. There were, at the time, about 29,000 varieties, so he focused on the year of his birth, 1938, then expanded that to those registered before 1900. Now, Hamm is considered an authority on historic (registered before 1940) and classic (1940-1969) daffodils.

Hamm gets a lot of help from his sister, Georgine Materniak, and friend, Carol Stough. He had to have his legs amputated in 2010 and uses a wheelchair, so he can’t get around his grounds like he would prefer. But there’s still a lot he can do.



Joe Hamm, holding a daffodil with a name on the stem, got his love of gardening from his grandfather and uncle.

“I miss getting physically into the dirt and digging, but I keep busy with it,” he said. “There’s a lot of bookkeeping involved.”

Hamm is getting ready for the 2018 ADS-approved juried daffodil show from 2:30 to 7:30 p.m. April 28 and from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. April 29, which is open to the

public. ADS members and non-members are welcome to submit entries. The show will include juried floral arrangements presented by the Martha Washington Garden Club and a photography exhibit.

The Daffodil Gardens, 99 Maple Road, off of Route 331 (Brush Run Road), are open daily and free to the public through the first week of May. Call 724-345-3762 for more information.

Photos by Celeste van Kirk/Observer-Reporter