

THE BREEDING OF PINK DAFFODILS IN TASMANIA

by

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THE growers of daffodil seedlings in Tasmania have been breeding pink daffodil seedlings since the early 1930's. Since then "pinks" have been improved and developed to such a marked extent that pink is now an accepted and established colour in daffodils in this island.

The first major step towards the production of the modern pink daffodil seedling in Tasmania was made by the late C. E. RADCLIFF as far back as 1931. In an early *Daffodil and Tulip Year Book* he describes this as a "lucky break". He also admits that the origin of the first few seedlings is obscure, but thought that the first one had 'Lord Kitchener' behind it. Amongst those first pink seedlings produced by Mr. RADCLIFF was one outstanding bloom bred from 'Mrs. Moodie' x 'Lemon Star', which he aptly named 'Pink of Dawn'. It would be quite safe to say that 'Pink of Dawn' was the first major step towards the production of the magnificent pinks that we now have in Tasmania, and it was also the means of spurring other hybridists on in this field. From then onwards a great variety of crosses were made with practically all the then established varieties that had the slightest semblance of pink in their make-up, such as 'Rosary', 'Lord Kitchener', 'Lemon Star', 'Mitylene', 'Mrs. Moodie', 'Pinkeen' and 'Mary Bluett'. Mr. RADCLIFF crossed 'Pink of Dawn' both ways with 'Rosary' as well as with many other named varieties. In the ensuing years any spare pollen that he had from this bloom was generously distributed amongst other growers, so much so that the majority of the really good pinks now being produced in Tasmania have 'Pink of Dawn' blood in them.

In 1933 my father, the late WILLIAM JACKSON, by crossing 'Mitylene' and 'Mary Bluett', produced a very dainty little bloom with a pink frill which he named 'Charis', but I can find no record of it being used to produce further pinks.

In 1935 Mr. RADCLIFF produced another outstanding pink which he named 'Dawnglow'. It was the result of his 1931 crosses of 'Pink of Dawn' and 'Rosary'. From then onwards more and better pinks were produced by all hybridists from a variety of crosses with these early productions of Mr. RADCLIFF's as the foundation.

In those early days our leading hybridists were afraid that this sudden appearance of pinks in their seedling beds might only be a flash in the pan, because it was something entirely new, and because of those early crosses less than twenty-five per cent produced pinks.

As it takes approximately five years from seed to flower, it required a great deal of patience and perseverance to prove whether they were right or wrong, but persevere they did, and we are now reaping the benefit of their patience and perseverance.

In looking through my father's early records I find that ten years later, which after all is only two generations of daffodils, he was already convinced that pink was a Mendelian factor in daffodils, because by then, when pinks were crossed with pinks they produced about fifty per cent of pink offsprings. In the next ten years this percentage has increased to about eighty per cent, and since then pink has become so well established that we now expect nearly a hundred per cent.

In the early days of the production of pink seedling daffodils in Tasmania the whole effort was directed towards producing a deeper and better pink colour in the seedlings, and to establish the fact that pink was a permanent daffodil colour. The desire to establish pink as a daffodil colour is quite understandable, because this was an entirely new break, and it was necessary to establish the colour first, before other refinements could be attempted. And when one looks back on the quality—judged by modern standards—of the parents of our early pink seedlings, one does realize that there was ample room for these refinements.

Most of those early pink seedlings lacked the two essentials of a white perianth daffodil—clearness of colour and firmness of texture. And so a majority of our early pinks, whilst having good pink cups, suffered badly from these two faults, as most of the perianths tended to be muddy in colour and *crêpey* in substance. In our latter years of breeding the emphasis has been to improve the quality, colour and texture of the perianth, whilst at the same time maintaining the depth and richness of the pink in the colour of the cups. Of course, this is a very slow process, but over the past decade there has been a marked improvement in the overall general standard of the pink seedlings produced in Tasmania.

To those hybridists who specialize in putting their seedlings on the show benches another problem presented itself—the lateness of flowering of the majority of pink seedlings. This fact can be most exasperating, as I know from my own personal experience. One of the best pinks I have flowered yet came from a batch of seedlings which first bloomed

in 1951, and it was not until I forced it under glass last season that I was able to put it on the show bench. It is not my usual practice to force blooms, but in this case my efforts were rewarded, because the bloom in question, which I have named 'Dallbro', on its first showing was the Grand Champion of the Dover Show.

This problem of the later flowering of our pink seedlings has been overcome to a great extent by all growers breeding from the odd good early pink seedling that has from time to time appeared in their seedling beds. Two years ago one of the first blooms to open in my seedling beds was a pink of show bloom standard and I was pleased to find that it again came early the next year. Other growers have had similar successes, and now seedling pinks are being produced throughout the whole of the normal flowering season.

There have been many other problems posed in the raising of pink daffodil seedlings in Tasmania besides the ones I have already mentioned. One of our major difficulties has been the production of full-trumpet pink seedlings. Most of our best pinks here in Tasmania are large cups, but as the years go on, more and more are being produced that measure up as full trumpets. Here again, it is only necessary to look at the parents of the early pink seedlings to see why large cups have predominated. The majority of those early ancestors of the pinks were themselves large cups, so of course it is only natural to expect that the majority of their descendants would be the same. Here again careful breeding over the years has to a certain extent stabilized the trumpet class of seedling pink daffodils.

To illustrate this point, and the others I have mentioned, regarding quality and substance, I give you the pedigree of one of my pinks, which flowered in 1953, and which I named 'Lustre' in 1956. It is a trumpet of good quality and substance, but it has been bred up from ancestors, the majority of whom are large cups (see page 4).

Over the years the growing of pink daffodil seedlings has created the greatest interest and enthusiasm amongst many growers in Tasmania, and although we believe that we now lead the world in pink large cups and pink trumpets we do not intend to rest upon our laurels. Whilst every daffodil breeder is still endeavouring to improve the general standard of the large cup and trumpet pinks, some growers have embarked in other fields, notably the production of a small cup pink and a pink double daffodil. To date I am unaware of any great progress having been made in the development of a pink small cup, but I am confident that in time it will be produced, just as successfully as have other pink classes.

Looking back now over the past twenty-five years or so of active breeding of pink daffodils in Tasmania, it does seem remarkable that we have made such extraordinary progress. To the uninitiated twenty-five years may seem a long time for this development, but to the seedling breeder twenty-five years only means at the most five generations, so it is all the more remarkable that so much progress has been made in the last quarter of a century.

We Tasmanian daffodil hybridists of the present day should indeed consider ourselves fortunate to be in the position to reap the benefit of the pioneering work in this field carried out by the late Mr. C. E. RADCLIFF. There is no doubt that he was the real pioneer in the field of pink daffodil seedlings in this state, and whatever progress and new development we have made we owe to his untiring work and the enthusiasm he created in those who followed him. What the future holds in this field no one knows, but we are sure that there will be a continued effort to produce the perfect pink daffodil in all classes of daffodils.