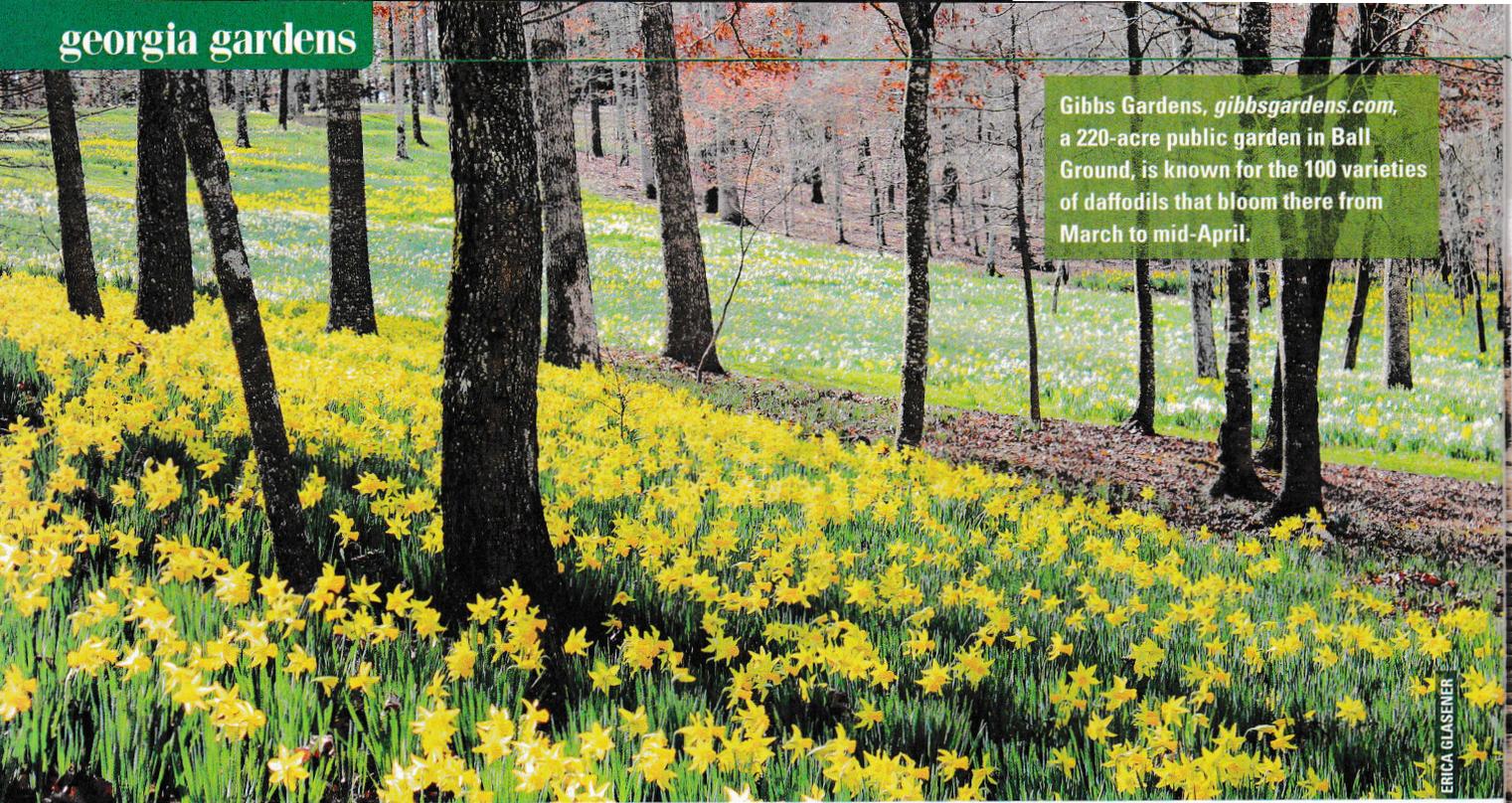


Gibbs Gardens, gibbsgardens.com, a 220-acre public garden in Ball Ground, is known for the 100 varieties of daffodils that bloom there from March to mid-April.



ERICA GLASENER

Plant a little sunshine

Daffodils for Southern gardens

BY ERICA GLASENER

There's something magical about daffodils. These harbingers of spring have inspired gardeners and poets alike for hundreds of years.

In the South, depending on the variety, daffodils may bloom as early as January and continue well into April. Most are hardy perennials that bloom year after year.

It's not unusual to see daffodils thriving in a long-abandoned garden, surrounding the foundation of what was once someone's home.

Elegant, tough and resilient, daffodils are easy to grow and provide years of beauty with minimal care. And if you have problems with deer eating your plants, daffodils are a good choice. Both the foliage and the bulbs contain poisonous crystals that critters typically avoid.

Daffodils come in myriad sizes and shapes, with flower colors that include orange, yellow, pink, white and two-tone. Many also offer de-



'Ice Follies'

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lightly fragrant blooms. While there are early, midseason and late-blooming types, all with their own unique appeal, some varieties are better-suited for the South's climate than others.

Sara Henderson, director of gardens at Oakland Cemetery in Atlanta, likes the early-blooming, yellow daffodil 'Rijnveld's Early Sensation.'

"It isn't the biggest, most perfect or fastest multiplier, but it is so welcome during the gray days of January," she says. "It reminds me that spring will be here before I know it."

Sara Van Beck, author of "Daffodils in American Gardens: 1733-1940," is also on the gardens staff at Oakland Cemetery. She says it is hard to pick a favorite, but the old-fashioned, yellow-and-white variety 'Minnie Hume' is her choice.

In the landscape, daffodils make a dramatic statement planted in large drifts or in garden beds under shrubs,

among groundcovers or with herbaceous plants in the perennial border. Depending on the garden setting, perennial companions like hellebores or daylilies can help mask daffodil foliage as it yellows and dries up after the flowers have faded.

How, when and where to plant daffodils

The best time to plant daffodil bulbs is when they are dormant and soil temperatures are cooler, usually from October through December.

Most daffodils prefer full sun. A half-day of sunshine is the minimum for good results. A deciduous woodland setting is ideal, because the daffodils will receive plenty of sun in the winter and early spring and welcome shade during the heat of summer.

Daffodils prefer a soil that is deep, rich in organic matter and well-drained. If your soil is compacted, mix in equal parts of organic matter (compost is ideal) and coarse builder's sand. Plant daffodil bulbs twice as deep as they are tall, with the broader base at the bottom of the hole and the "nose" pointing up.

Plant the bulbs in groups for the best effect. Daffodils multiply easily and can grow happily in the same location for years. If the amount of blooms is reduced after three to five years, this is a good indication that you should divide and transplant bulbs.

Scatter granular fertilizer around new growth and water it in when shoots begin to emerge in early spring. Use low-nitrogen fertilizers for daffodils, because excess nitrogen can promote lush foliage at the expense of blooms.

Water newly planted bulbs immediately, then fall and winter rains should provide sufficient moisture until new growth appears. During the growing season, March through May, 1/2 to 1 inch of moisture per week is ideal. Continue to water daffodils for several weeks after they bloom, then stop.

After daffodils finish flowering, wait until at least a third of the foliage

turns yellow before cutting it back. They need their foliage to help store food for next year's blooms.

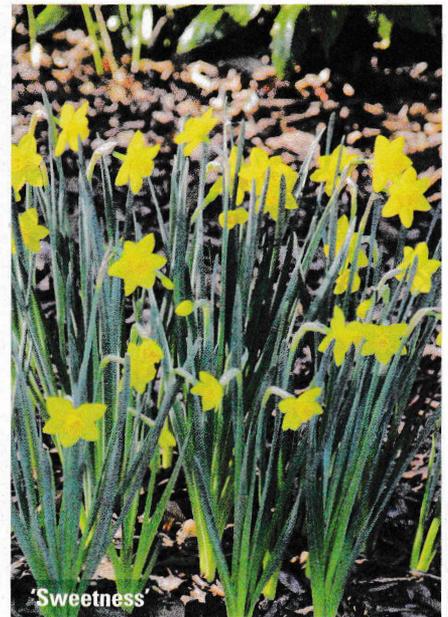
Daffodils for Southern gardens

According to the American Daffodil Society, there are more than 25,000 registered cultivars, but some perform better in Georgia than others. The varieties below have stood the test of time in Southern gardens.

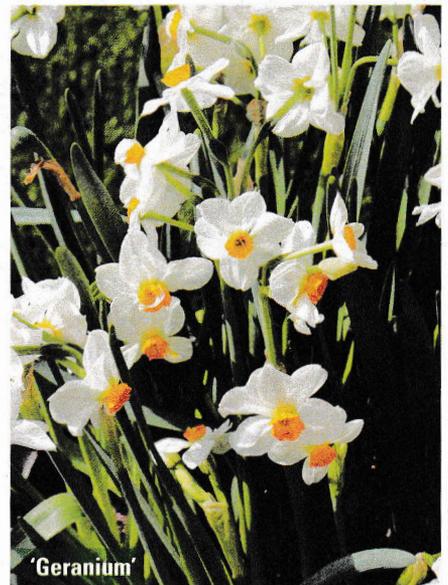
- **'Avalanche'**: sports 10 or more fragrant, white flowers with yellow cups on each stem in midspring.
- **'Carlton'**: two-toned, fragrant, yellow flowers in early spring; spreads rapidly.
- **'Cheerfulness'**: double, creamy-white, fragrant flowers; a late bloomer.
- **'February Gold'**: a reliable, early bloomer with yellow flowers.
- **'Fortissimo'**: large blooms with yellow petals and orange cups; blooms in midspring.
- **'Fortune'**: an early bloomer; yellow with a yellow-gold cup.
- **'Geranium'**: creamy-white flowers with small orange cups; blooms in mid- to late spring.
- **'Ice Follies'**: white with a yellow cup; an early bloomer.
- **'Narcissus pseudonarcissus'**: yellow flowers, great for naturalizing; an early bloomer.
- **'Rijnveld's Early Sensation'**: often blooms in January; two-toned, yellow flowers.
- **'Sweetness'**: bright-yellow blooms in midspring; very fragrant.
- **'Tete-a-Tete'**: early-blooming miniature; yellow flowers with darker yellow cups.
- **'Thalia'**: white flowers in mid- to late spring.
- **'Trevithian'**: strongly fragrant, yellow flowers; blooms in midspring.

For more recommendations, visit the Georgia Daffodil Society at georgiadaffodilsociety.com or the American Daffodil Society at daffodilusa.org.

Erica Glasener is an Atlanta-based freelance writer and senior producer for "Growing a Greener World," airing on PBS stations.



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