

The quest for beautiful Green Daffodils

By Bob Spotts

of Oakley, California: daffodil hybridist and past President of the American Daffodil Society

Truly, a lovely bloom in shades of green is not a common vision held by persons who love and grow daffodils. But the same status has been true at the outset of other hybridizing successes, whether they be daffodils with cups of pink, or daffodils with ruffled cups split apart nearly to their base. In plant breeding, similar to most facets of life, innovations usually are initially resisted then eventually praised as their utility and beauty are recognized.

Daffodil breeders long had observed that green does appear in the throats and cups of many modern daffodils, and so have incorporated green (along with white, yellow, orange, red and pink) as possible daffodil colourings. Yet, no daffodil hybrid existed with a cup or perianth entirely of green. In the USA, New Zealand and Australia, several enthusiasts have shared the vision of a green daffodil and have worked

patiently toward making it a reality.

Manuel Lima, in California USA in the 1960s, probably was the first person to recognize the potential of breeding beautiful daffodils using the wild green daffodil *N. viridiflorus* (photo at bottom left). Native to Mediterranean Spain and Northern Africa, the bloom of this species daffodil is small (diameter about 25mm) and rather ungainly. *N. viridiflorus* blooms in the Fall instead of the Spring! But, it is totally green. Much hybridizing would be required to incorporate its colour but discard its shape. Manuel initiated his efforts in 1965 and saw new fruits of his efforts with every new year of bloom. He placed *viridiflorus* pollen on every species and green-eyed hybrid he could obtain. When I first met Manuel, he had dozens of pots of little greenish daffodils blooming. Absolutely stunning little flowers mimicking the shapes and hues of their daffodil seed-parents but with petals flushed with green.

Manuel grew all his daffodils in pots. In the Winter of 1990-1991, the California Valley endured a record three-week deep-freeze that froze all Manuel's pots of daffodils solid. The temperature dipped down to -11°C and did not rise above freezing for most of that December period. All of Manuel's plants were killed. Twenty-six years of labour was lost. He started anew and continued creating new blossoms in green (e.g. 'Verdant Sparks' - photo on right) until his passing in 2003.

Perhaps it was not Manuel's breeding accomplishments that were most remarkable; it was the way he

pursued his goal. His dogged determination exceeded that of any person I have ever known. His health was always precarious and prevented any continuing employment, so he lacked the money to purchase new daffodil varieties to use in breeding. For daffodils to use as seed parents, he relied on the occasional bargain sales, plus the generosity of those daffodil enthusiasts who knew him. A recluse, few individuals met him personally, but his hybridizing was known through correspondence and respected worldwide. Lindsay Dettman, a prominent daffodil hybridist in Victoria, named one of his new cultivars 'Manuel Lima'. Manuel repaid his friends by sending them pollen and seeds from his creations, as well as bulbs of the wild *N. viridiflorus*, rarely available elsewhere but which he grew to perfection.

I met Manuel in the mid-1980s. His



N. viridiflorus



'Verdant Sparks'



'Mesa Verde'



'Think Green' seedling;
photo by Kirby Fong

enthusiasm was infectious. I was a novice hybridist and was soon also breeding for green daffodils with a head-start provided by using pollen from Manuel's best seedlings. My own efforts have resulted in introducing 'Mesa Verde', to date probably the best green daffodil for garden and show (photo above). Upon Manuel's passing, I inherited most of his seedlings, none of which yet had sufficient quantity to be named and released to the public. I have carried on breeding from his seedlings for several generations and now am flowering several daffodils with distinct possibilities for future introduction to the public. As breeding continues over several generations, the form of the resulting blooms has become more pleasingly symmetric but the depth and lasting of the green in the petals has lessened. I might name my favorite 'Think Green' since it almost takes that to recognize the subtle green

hue in the petals (photo top right).

In the 1970s, independently of Manuel Lima, world-renowned daffodil hybridist John Hunter in South Island, New Zealand also initiated a program of breeding with *Narcissus viridiflorus*. Among his many contributions with green in the cups, his most important is his cultivar 'Emerald Sea', an unusually fast increaser which is also exceptionally fertile. These important qualities for hybridizing are not common among *viridiflorus* hybrids. 'Emerald Sea' has opened the gates for hybridists in the future to make rapid progress toward daffodils with petals or cups in shades of green.

Dr Harold Koopowitz of California has germinated seeds sent to him by Manuel Lima in the year before his passing and from them has created, registered and introduced striking green daffodils under Manuel's credit. Dr Koopowitz is also using

these green daffodils in his extensive hybridizing of miniature daffodils. There will be little green daffodils in our future!

In the past dozen years, Lawrence Trevanian of Canberra, Australia, has produced many amazing new daffodil cultivars (see seedling on Bulletin cover), many of which are from *viridiflorus* breeding. Lawrence is an innovative hybridist and with many seedlings 'in his pipeline' (yet to bloom), his continuing advancement is a near certainty.

With the recognition of the beauty of the green hybrids so far created, many other skilled daffodil hybridists worldwide have joined in the quest – notably Fred Silcock in Victoria, Australia, Theo Sanders in Germany, and Arno Kroon in Holland. In the future, beautiful daffodils in green will grace our gardens.

HSOC Christmas Gathering Monday 16 December 6:30pm

At Maddies, the Kingston Hotel, 73 Canberra Avenue

For 'The King of Christmas Parties'

Entrée, Main & Dessert \$35.00 per head

Dips & warm bread on arrival

Entrée: served as platters on table

Beef Kofta Meatballs with minted yoghurt

Zucchini & Corn Fritters with garlic aioli

Coconut Crumbed Prawns with mango & coriander salsa

House Salad

Main: 50/50 alternating service

Roast Turkey with apricot stuffing, roast potato, pumpkin, green beans, cranberry sauce & gravy

Moroccan Salmon Fillet with roasted kipfler potato, baby spinach salad & minted yoghurt [gf on request]

Vegetarian option available on request

Dessert: 50/50 alternating service

Christmas Pudding with brandy custard

Custard-filled Profiteroles with warm chocolate sauce

Bookings & payment to Joan Crook at Shows or Information Evenings. Cut-off date is 9 December.

