

## Tiny Corbett Becomes Worldwide Daffodil Power

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If Portland is the City of Roses, then the wind-whipped hills of Corbett should be called the City of Daffodils.

The modest town at the mouth of the Columbia River Gorge is known throughout the world among the rarefied ranks of daffodil fanciers. For Corbett is home to the Evans clan.

The story began with the late Murray Evans. A breeder of more than 300 internationally registered varieties, the Corbett resident is well known to those who grow and show hybrid daffodils for floral competitions. Though Evans died in 1989, family and friends continue to grow and sell many Evans hybrids, creating a colony of bulb businesses in tiny Corbett.

But don't look for familiar garden daffodils such as King Alfred or Ice Follies from any of the Evans crew--that's not the crowd to which they cater. This bunch of flower breeders deals in exclusive varieties that can cost as much as \$75 or more per bulb.

"People who show competitively have a completely different set of standards than a home gardener," says Bill Tribe of Oregon Trail Daffodils. "Competitive growers want to know about color, size and form, not weather resistance or how easy a particular variety is to grow."

Oregon Trail's Tribe is married to Diane Tribe, Murray Evans' niece. The Tribes took on the bulk of Evans' stock after his death seven years ago. The Tribes produce a 32- to 36-page catalog each year of approximately 300 varieties, and sell to customers worldwide, including Holland, England and Japan.

Nephew Ronald Evans and his wife, Sandy, operate Columbia Gorge Daffodils and Trees. They sell several dozen varieties to people on the daffodil show circuit, some from Murray Evans' stock and some of their own varieties. Their bulbs range from \$8 to \$20 each.

"Oregon is considered one of the best daffodil growing environments in the U.S.," says Sandy Evans. "Hybridizers from other parts of the country, and even other countries, often send sample bulbs to growers here to test."

A third Corbett grower came into the business as a friend of the family. Frank and Jeanie Driver, owners of Bonnie Brae Gardens, were family friends who developed an interest in the business from Evans' enthusiasm. Following Murray's death, the Drivers took on all of his miniature varieties--petite plants that can be as small as 4 inches high.

"There is a whole separate following of people who are miniatures enthusiasts," says Jeanie Driver. "I have people order from as far away as Ireland."

Bonnie Brae sells about three dozen varieties--19 of them miniatures. Miniatures can be more difficult to propagate than larger varieties, and Murray Evans' original collection included what are considered many of the world's premier minis. Driver says the thumbnail-size bulbs can sell for as much as \$30 each.

Bill Tribe says many varieties bred by the late Evans himself are still coming into various catalogs. That's because it takes from 12 to 15 years to bring a promising seedling to market. New introductions are a grower's big money-maker, however.

"The longer an individual bulb has been on the market, the more people have it," notes Tribe. "That's when the price slides down to \$1 or \$2 a bulb and it just isn't worth it for a specialty grower to handle anymore."

That's because bulbs at that level of availability are plentiful enough to grow for the commercial garden bulb trade--which brings the huge Dutch breeding houses into the act. "There is no way a niche grower can compete with the kind of propagation operations they have," says Tribe. "They can work on a massive scale."

So when a special seedling appears that looks like a real possibility for the commercial garden trade, specialty growers usually seek out propagators in the commercial trade to take the new variety to market.

Tribe did just that with a variety bred by Murray Evans shortly before his death. Tribe sold the promising variety to the chic garden catalog Wayside Gardens for commercial introduction. Already registered with the British Royal Horticultural society under the name "Multnomah," the brilliant yellow daffodil with an orange-rimmed cup should be brought to market in the next year or two.

Ironically, though many daffodils carry names which would seem to indicate they were developed here, most were not. That despite the fact that many farmers in the northern Willamette Valley once grew bulbs for commercial bulb catalog houses.

"The Dutch did a tremendous trade here with bulb farmers prior to World War II and named many of their varieties after local landmarks and such," says Stella Evans, Murray's widow. "Very famous varieties like Mt. Hood (a creamy white daffodil) were really Dutch introductions."

The good news is, there is a trio of growers in Corbett who can offer dozens of truly local varieties that would be coveted by any connoisseur.

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