

Nymphs and Narcissi

Narkissos was a handsome but vain young man in Greek mythology. After the beautiful nymph Echo died of unrequited desire for him, the gods caused Narkissos to fall in love with his own reflection in the water of a fountain. This was not a very satisfying relationship for Narkissos, who pined away and turned into a narcissus flower. Which came first, the flower or the myth? We may never know. All we can be sure of is that the legend gives us our word "narcissism" for excessive self-admiration, a warning to treat the feelings of nymphs with courtesy, and the immortalization of one of the oldest and most rewarding flowers in the historical garden.

Narcissus is a plant genus native to the Mediterranean that includes such familiar garden plants as daffodils and jonquils. The Egyptians and Greeks grew varieties of narcissus, and daffodils were blooming in England by the 16th century. The English herbalist John Gerard, who published his *The Herball or General Historie of Plants* in 1597, thought them almost too common to be worth reporting on, for "we have them all [narcissus varieties] & everie one of them in our London gardens, in great abundance. The common wilde Daffodill groweth wilde in fields and sides of woods in the West parts of England." He quoted the ancient physician Galen as an authority for the alleged healing properties of daffodil bulbs, which when pulverized with honey were supposed to be a good dressing for burns, cuts, and joint pains.

According to Scott Kunst, who sells antique bulbs through his company Old House Gardens, daffodils were never subject to the mania for breeding,



Daffodils

by Kathleen McClelland



J.L. Childs Catalog, 1905.

buying and selling that afflicted tulips and hyacinths in the 17th and 18th centuries. (The hyacinth also derives its name from myth. Hyacinthos was transformed into the fragrant flower after being killed; different versions attribute his death to either Apollo the sun god or Zephyros the wind god.) There are 24,000 cultivars listed in the Royal Horticultural Society's International Daffodil Checklist, but of these perhaps 50 originated in the 1600s and a further 350 pre-date 1860, and not all of these were well known in their own day. All that changed between 1860 and 1900, Scott says, when British breeders introduced about 1,000 new narcissus varieties. From the turn of the century to 1930, another 6,000 appeared on the market, but few of them are still commercially available.

How to Recognize a Daffodil

Daffodils are organized into 12 different divisions based on physical traits and genetic heritage. Here is a quick tour of the divisions and some of the older varieties within each one.

Division I: Trumpet Daffodils.

One flower to a stem. The trumpet or corona is at least as long as the perianth (which is made up of petals and sepals, the green, leaflike outer parts of the flower). Heirlooms in this category include light and deeper yellow 'Emperor,' 1865; pale yellow miniature 'W.P. Milner,' 1869; and 'Golden Spur,' 1885. Beware of any yellow trumpet daffodil labeled 'King Alfred,' for the genuine article from 1899 is seldom available. Like Elvis, this King is often seen but hard to verify.

Division II: Large Cupped Daffodils. One flower to a stem. The cup or corona is more than one-third as long, but never as long as, the length of the perianth segments. Antiques include 'Sir Watkin,' gold cup and sulphur-yellow perianth, 1884; 'Dick Wellband,' with white petals and deep orange cup, 1921; and 'Carlton,' a two-toned yellow with vanilla fragrance (Brent and Becky Heath of The Daffodil Mart call it the world's most numerous daffodil, and an especially good perennializer for the South), 1927.

Division III: Small Cupped Daffodils. One flower to a stem. The cup is no more than one-third the length of the perianth. Some old ones are 'Barrii Conspicuus,' very popular in Victorian gardens with its light yellow petals and orange-rimmed cup, 1869; 'White Lady,' a long-lasting perennial with white petals and yellow cup, by 1890; and white 'Queen of the North,' by 1908.

Division IV: Double Daffodils. One or more flowers to a stem. The perianth or corona, or both, can be doubled. For your 17th century garden restoration, look for yellow (sometimes green-streaked) 'Van Sion' (c. 1600), which may unpredictably double either the whole blossom or just the trumpet. Scott calls 'Butter and Eggs' a more reliable, better colored old double that was known by 1777. The fragrant white 'Albus Plenus Odoratus' of 1861 is similar to double poeticus types known in the 17th century, and will be happiest where spring weather doesn't get too hot.

Division V: Triandrus Daffodils. Two or three nodding blossoms per stem, with reflexed petals. Look for white, fragrant

'Thalia,' 1916, and the larger, later-blooming 'Trasamble,' 1930.

Division VI: Cyclamineus Daffodils. Very reflexed petals, early blooming. 'Beryl' is a 1907 miniature cross between *N. Cyclamineus* and *N. poeticus*; petals open yellow and age to white, and the cup is edged orange. 'February Gold' is a two-tone yellow from 1923.

Division VII: Jonquilla Daffodils. May have several fragrant flowers per stem, does well in hot summers. Look for 'Golden Perfection,' pre-1925 and 'Lintie,' yellow with red-banded cup, by 1937.

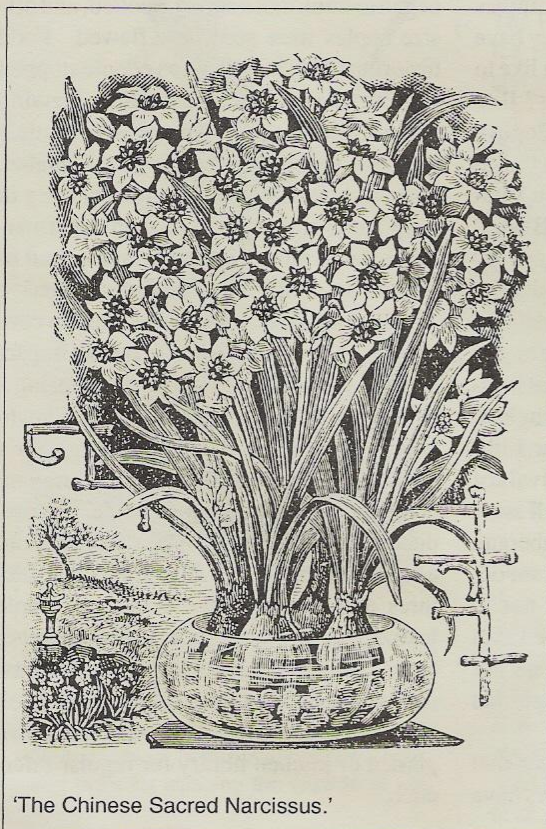
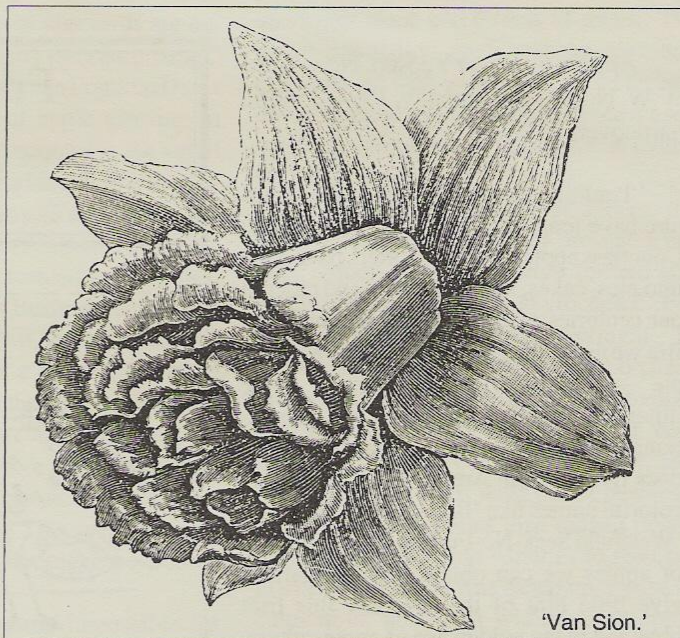
Division VIII: Tazetta Daffodils. Several musky-scented flowers to a stem, good naturalizers for the South. 'Avalanche,' a.k.a. 'Seventeen Sisters,' white petals and yellow cup, 1700; 'Chinese Sacred Narcissus' (1880s, white with yellow cup; Victorians forced the bulbs in shallow bowls of water and pebbles); 'Elvira' (the older, single form of 'Cheerfulness,' 1923), 1902; 'Laurens Koster,' white with orange/yellow cups, by 1906; and 'Scarlet Gem,' saffron-yellow petals with frilled orange-red cup, 1910.

Division IX: Poeticus Daffodils. Dogwood-like white petals, usually with a disc-shaped corona. 'Actaea' is a nice perennializer from 1927 that is often mistaken for 'Pheasant's Eye,' which was known by 1600 (see Division X). Others with green/yellow/red cups are 'Feline,' 1930, 'Cantabile,' 1932, and 'Milan,' 1932.

Division X: Species and Wild Forms. All species, wild or reputedly wild forms, and their hybrids. The 'Pheasant's Eye' (*N. Poeticus* var. *Recurvus*) offered by Old House Gardens is probably an early 19th version of the Elizabethan flower. Also 'Campenelle' (*N. x odorus* 'Plenus'), a scented yellow double known by 1601 and widely grown in the 19th century; yellow *N. obvallaris*, 17th or 18th century; yellow *N. pseudonarcissus* or 'Lent Lily,' a staple of American gardens for centuries with unusual twisted petals, by 1570; 'Hoop Petticoats' (*N. bulbocodium*), a yellow miniature (6-10") known in the 17th century and very popular in the 19th, with flaring cups and narrow pointed petals; and 'Texas Star' (*N. x intermedius*), a natural hybrid of *N. jonquilla* and *N. tazetta*, with clustered yellow flowers, by 1816.

Division XI: Split Corona Daffodils. The cup is usually split more than half its length. These are not historical varieties.

Division XII: Various or Miscellaneous. All daffodils that don't fall into one of the other divisions.



Joining Other Daffodil Lovers

A flower with such diversity and history needs its own society! You can join the American Daffodil Society for \$20 (c/o Mary Lou Gripshover, Executive Director, 1686 Grey Fox Trails, Milford OH 45150) and receive *The Daffodil Journal*, a quarterly color maga-

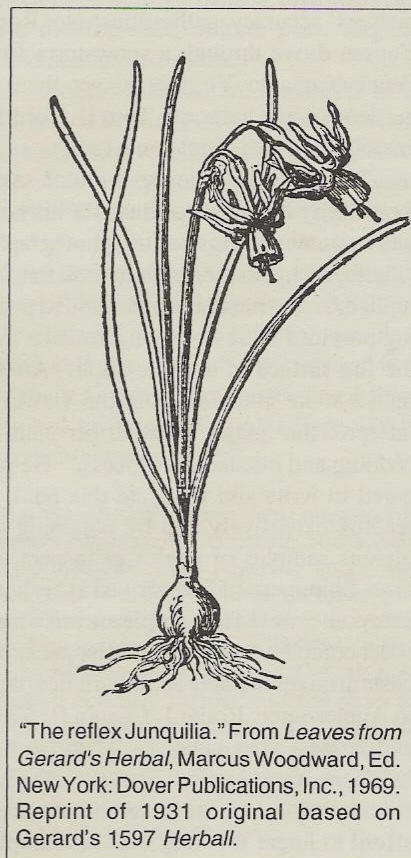
zine with advice for daffodil lovers, reports from gardens, and daffodil competition results. The ADS also sponsors a "Historical Round Robin." This is a letter that travels among members with an interest in antique narcissus.

One Round Robin participant is Joseph G. Hamm of Indiana, who has kindly shared some thoughts about his 44 years of growing daffodils. "As a teenager I enjoyed mythology and especially the stories of Narcissus and Hyacinth, and I guess there was something magical about these bulbs that bloomed, died, multiplied and came back again to repeat this cycle of becoming a beautiful flower."

His first antique daffodil was the 18th century *N. pseudonarcissus*, which Joe describes as "looking like a scaled-down 'King Alfred.'" Another favorite is 'Sir Watkin' (1884), which he considers to have more of the species appearance. "It is this 'wild' look that I find appealing in 'Will Scarlett' (1898), 'Emperor' (1865) and 'Empress' (1865)." Joe also likes 'Barrii Conspicuous' (1869). "The addition of the red to a loose, free flowing bloom makes it an exciting addition to the garden."

Another one Joe likes is 'Golden Spur' (1885), with its long trumpet which he points out is similar in appearance to 'Peeping Tom' (1948). 'Van Sion,' which was first written up about 1600, is an erratic performer. "Some years it is almost green, with yellow streaks, contorted

See 'Daffodils' on page 12

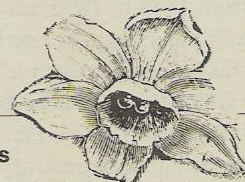


"The reflex Jonquilla." From *Leaves from Gerard's Herbal*, Marcus Woodward, Ed. New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1969. Reprint of 1931 original based on Gerard's 1597 *Herball*.

Nursery Sources *Continued from page 1*

Manson's Landing, Cortes Island, B.C. V0P 1K0. Bill and Elena Wheeler's organic nursery specializes in the custom propagation of rare and unusual fruit trees and offers over 100 varieties of apples on 10 different rootstocks. Among the Canadian heirloom trees they either grow themselves or can obtain are 'McIntosh' (discovered in Ontario in 1796, named and introduced commercially in 1870); its parent 'Snow' (a.k.a. 'Fameuse,' grown from seed brought to Quebec from France in the 1600s); 'Wagener' (an 1820 hybrid of 'Northern Spy' described as a good all-purpose apple); 'Grimsby' (a 19th century chance seedling of 'Snow'); 'Swayzie' (1872, a.k.a. 'Swazie Pomme Grise,' a winter dessert apple that develops its flavor in storage), and these apples raised by the government research farm in Ottawa: 'Melba' (1898, dessert type), its sport 'Red Melba' (1909), 'Lobo' (1910, dessert type), and 'Geneva' (1930, big red-fleshed crab); catalog \$4. **Pomona Orchards**, Box 111, Rockton ON L0R 1X0; (519) 621-

8897; operated by Fred Janson; scion wood and bud wood of heirloom varieties like 'Cox's Orange Pippin' (by 1830, England, high vitamin C, heavy bearing, classic dessert apple; blooms late and reblooms, so avoids frost damage). Mr. Janson is co-founder of **North American Fruit Explorers (NAFEX)**, Rte. 1, Box 94, Chapin IL 62628; \$8/year brings you the quarterly journal *Pomona* with articles on finding, growing and using many fruits old and new, and access to a large library of pomological materials. **Woodwinds Nursery**, Box 21-13, Bluevale, ON N0G 1G; 'Ribston Pippin' (England, early 18th century, high vitamin C); 'Primate' (possibly New York c. 1840, hardy, early bearing); 'St. Edmund's Pippin' (England, c. 1870, for dessert); 'Dudley Winter' (a.k.a. 'North Star,' Maine, 1891, aromatic, juicy fruit); helpful advice on planting, selecting varieties for pollinating, disease resistance; catalog \$2.



Daffodils *Continued from page 9*

and barely opening; other years it is just magnificent with barely any green." He agrees with Scott Kunst's evaluation that 'Butter and Eggs' (1777) is a more consistent cultivar.

"Then we have the ladies, the carefree soft forms of 'White Lady' (1898), 'Queen of the North' (1908), 'Pearly Queen' (1927), 'St. Agnes' (white petals, orange cup, 1926), 'Elvira' (white petals, yellow-orange cup, 1902), 'Mrs. R.O. Backhouse,' the first pink (1923), and one of my favorites since she is so undemanding, 'Mrs. Ernst H. Krelage' (white, 1912). I would be remiss if I did not include Beryl (yellow-orange, 1907), which is a delight in the foreground of the bed and even more appreciated on a hillside to be viewed at eye level."

Daffodil season ends with the poeticus types. "*N. poeticus var. recurvus* is probably the oldest I have growing in my garden. 'Juliet' (1907), 'Raeburn' (1913) and 'Milan' (1932) are just a few others that grow, but do not necessarily multiply with vigor."

Joe recommends planting the early bloomers under trees; others do well in his yard under ivies and ground covers, or between hostas, ferns, peonies and other deciduous perennials. With over 140 daffodils in his garden that were introduced before 1940, he finds it hard to limit his list of favorites. "In season they are all 'the best,' and when one has bloom from as early as March 10 with 'March Sunshine' (1923) and ends the season in early to mid June with 'Felindre' (1930) or *N. x Gracilis* (*x tenuoir*; by 1979), what else can one want from a plant?"

It is hard to imagine what else one could ask!

Some Heirloom Daffodil Sources

The Daffodil Mart, 7463 Heath Trail, Gloucester VA 23061; (800) ALL-BULB. The big catalog is \$1 and offers other flowers: tulips, alliums, amaryllis, anemones, bulbocodium, camassia, chinodoxa, corydalis, crinodonna, crocus, dracunculus, Dutch iris, eranthus, eremurus, erythronium, fritillaria, galanthus, geranium, hemerocallis, hyacinthoides hispanica, hyacinths, dwarf iris, ornithogalum, oxalis, puschkinia, scilla, Siberian iris, and velthemia. Also tools, fertilizers, books, and slide talks/consultations for using bulbs in the historic or modern landscape.

Old House Gardens, 536 Third St., Ann Arbor MI 48103; (313) 995-1486. Painsstaking research ensures reliable authenticity for this \$1 catalog of antique daffodils, tulips, crocus, hyacinths, and lesser-known bulbs such as snake's-head fritillary or checkered lily, known by 1572. This is the only mail-order retailer for the heirlooms of Sisters' Bulb Farm. Also books, a reprint of an 1872 bulb catalog, and consultation services from proprietor/landscape historian Scott Kunst.

Mary Mattison van Schaik Imported Dutch Bulbs, P.O. Box 32, Cavendish VT 05142; (802) 226-7653 (evenings). Free flyer listing daffodils, tulips, crocus, snowdrops, other bulbs, including some antiques and species.

Nancy R. Wilson Species and Miniature Narcissus, 6526 Brice-land-Thorn Road, Garberville CA 95542. Free brochure listing bulbocodium, pseudonarcissus, jonquilla, wild hybrids, and hybrid narcissus. Nancy grows species narcissus from seed to offset the destruction of wild populations due to road building, grazing, and over-collecting.



Apples *Continued from page 11*

growers like Tom Burford and Lee Calhoun, educational outreach by historic sites like Monticello (which hosts Burford's annual apple tastings), and all the participants in the heirloom seed and plant movement, consumer demand for heritage fruits, flowers and vegetables is growing all the time. As more people discover the world of diverse flavors that heritage fruits offer, the history of the apple continues to be written.

Nancy Sorrells is Research Historian at the Museum of American Frontier Culture in Staunton, Virginia. All apples mentioned in this article are available from Burford Brothers in 1996 as either trees or benchgrafts.

THE HISTORICAL GARDENER

Publisher/Editor: Kathleen McClelland

Co-Editor: Bill McClelland

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