

All about daffodils



DAFFODILS ARE MY FAVOURITE spring-flowering bulbs. They provide welcome and cheerful colour after a long winter, require almost no care, are very hardy (generally down to -35 C), and are avoided by deer and most other mammals. You can grow daffodils in almost any garden, as long as it is not too wet. As with most other spring-blooming bulbs, daffodils need about four-to-six weeks of warmer soil temperatures to establish roots. This means the ideal time to plant is late September.

Plant with the bulb base about six inches deep below the soil surface. Daffodils lend themselves to informal plantings, so individual holes can be randomly spaced, especially if you are going for the “natural” look.. Place some bulb fertilizer, or a source of phosphorus (for root growth) in the holes prior to planting. You can use bone meal, but it is said to attract skunks. I use it, however, and have never had a problem with skunks or other critters.

You thought daffodils were all pretty much the same – big, yellow spring flowers? Think again. Daffodils are a huge group, with about a dozen classifications, depending on height and type of flowers. Flowers consist of outer petals (together called the “perianth”), and usually inner ones fused into a tube (called the “corona”). If the corona is equal to or longer than the petals, it is called a “trumpet”. If it is shorter, it is called a “cup”.

King Alfred was for years the standard yellow trumpet type. Others you’ll find commonly now are Dutch Master, Golden Harvest, and Unsurpassable. These have the typical golden yellow flowers, compared to the all-white flowers of Mount Hood, or the white petals and yellow trumpet of Las Vegas and Bravoure among others. The cup daffodils are further divided into small and large cups. If the cups are at least one-third the length of the petals, they are large cup types. In this group are Accent (white petals, pink cup), Fortissimo (yellow petals, red-orange cup), Ice Follies (white petals, lemon yellow cup), and Carlton (yellow petals, yellow cup). Small cup types include Barrett Browning (white petals, orange cup), Flower Record (white petals, yellow cup), and Ring of Fire (white petals, red cup).

Then there are the more exotic types such as the butterfly and double daffodils. Butterfly types are those with the corona split and perhaps ruffled in appearance. Berlin has yellow petals, orange center. Orangerie has white petals and orange center. Rosado has white petals, peach center. Sunnyside Up has white petals and light yellow centre. Double daffodils have double petals, double corona, or both. Golden Ducat, a version of King Alfred, is a gold example. Replete has white petals and orange centre. Ice King has white flowers and yellow centre. Manly is yellow throughout.

All of the above are hybrids. Among popular species daffodils is the heirloom Poet's daffodil, with a small yellow cup with red rim and white petals. The Triandrus species, such as the white Thalia, has two or more hanging flowers with petals pointed backwards. Jonquilla daffodils are similar, but their flowers don’t hang and the petals aren’t reflexed. Examples are the dwarf Sun Dial or Sun Disc.

Keep in mind when buying bulbs that they are graded according to size, and priced accordingly. If all you want is a mix to plant randomly in the landscape, or to “naturalize”, then buy cheaper bulbs. If you want a better show with more and larger flowers, especially of new hybrids, you’ll pay more – consider it an investment that will multiply for many years.