

Bright, nodding blooms are often called either daffodil or narcissus. It's easy to decide which to use. Narcissus is the botanical or scientific name of the whole genus, but the narcissus is also a short-cupped member of the family. Daffodil is the common name for the tribe but also refers to those flowers with long trumpets.

Even before the sun brightens late winter and early spring skies, there is sunshine on the ground when daffodils bloom. Varieties of daffodils can be found that flower with the crocus and continue in succession until tulips provide a rainbow of color.

Make the most of daffodils

The delight of that first daffodil can be extended for weeks with a little planning (bulb catalogue in hand). As tulips are divided into classes, narcissus are separated into divisions. The trumpet division, for example, has the trumpet or corona as long as the outer petals, one flower to a stem.

Another division is called large-cupped. This one has a cup a third or more the length of the outer petals. Members of the doubles division, with their extra petals, are fluffy and showy. Some varieties have long petals of creamy white and a center of lemon and bright orange-red. The triandrus division has up to six flowers on a stem with narrow rush-like foliage. Many triandrus selections are good in the rock garden.

The cyclamineus division has wavy-lipped coronas, petals that curve back, and gracefully drooping heads. The jonquilla division (or jonquils) has a fine scent and long, narrow leaves and stems. The species or wild narcissus are offspring of those growing freely in nature.

Planting daffodils

Daffodils may be grown in either full or partial sun. Because they go through much of their growth before many trees have foliage, daffodils may be used under large trees, especially if the tree leafs out late. Daffodils make good companions for other plants. If you grow them in rows along driveways, sidewalks, or walls, mix them with iris for late spring, phlox for midsummer, and mums for fall, to hide aging foliage. Or try annuals, such as nasturtiums, zinnias, portulaca, petunias, or marigolds, for a yearly change.

Wherever they go, make sure the earliest varieties, such as *Narcissus cyclamineus*, are planted in sheltered spots. This protection may allow them to bloom a week earlier than if they were exposed.

How to naturalize

Daffodils are able to compete with low grass and may be planted here and there in an unorganized way to look as though they are growing wild in the lawn. However, as with tulips, the foliage must be allowed to mature before being mowed down.

A money-saving tip: use a mix of narcissus for naturalizing. Many catalogues offer such a grouping. To get the casual effect, take a handful of the bulbs and toss them gently. Plant them where they land.

Special needs

Daffodils need well-drained soil. Soil that is too tight or in low areas with poor drainage may promote bulb rot. If the foliage in spring is streaked with yellow or if it dies prematurely, bulb rot might be the problem. Dig out such bulbs. If you can see rot at the base, discard the bulbs and dig out any nearby to prevent spread. If you don't find rot, the bulbs may be stored in a dry place for replanting in fall.

Early September (in the North) and October are best times for planting. If you're planting later, apply a heavy mulch to postpone hard freezing of the ground, so roots have a longer time to develop. For best effect, plant at least six of a variety to a group.

Unless bulbs are to be naturalized, excavate the planting area to a depth of four or five inches, and turn the soil in the bottom of the hole a full spade's depth. If the soil is heavy, add sand and vermiculite or perlite to loosen it. Dig individual holes eight inches deep from soil surface, six inches apart. Firm the soil in the bottom of these holes with your fist before putting one bulb in each hole. If the soil is poor, add liberal amounts of organic matter, as well as a small amount of high-phosphorus fertilizer. Don't fertilize again until after the leaves have emerged in the spring.

Cover the bulbs, and replace the excavated soil to make the soil surface level with the bed. Water well at planting time and then every week or so until winter arrives.

After the flowers fade and leaves yellow in the spring, the foliage must be left intact to build up the strength of the bulbs for next year's cheerful nodding bloom.