

Naturalizing Daffodils in the Landscape



Photo by Linda van Beck: Daffodils will naturalize in the north Florida landscape if you select the proper type such as this Fortune daffodil.

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Imagine a drift of bright yellow daffodils gleaming in the late winter sun. What a fitting harbinger of spring. With a little effort you can experience this colorful show in your landscape for years to come. Daffodil bulbs, when properly selected and planted will multiply over time, one bulb becoming two, then four and eventually many more. To plant with this in mind is known as naturalizing. Of all of the spring bulbs planted in this area, only daffodils are suitable for naturalizing.

To be successful it is important that you get off to a good start. Of prime importance is selecting the right varieties for this area. Check with your supplier. The following five selections do well here: Soliel d'Or (blooms in January), Carlton, and Sweetness (bloom in February), Ice Follies and Golden Dawn (bloom in early March). All five should be available locally. The Florida Daffodil Society has a much longer list. Check their web site at www.FlaDaff.com.

Care of the bulbs before planting is of equal importance. **DO NOT REFRIGERATE** your daffodil bulbs. Keep them cool, dry, well ventilated and out of the sun until planted. Store in a mesh bag, never in a plastic bag, in an air conditioned space. The best advice is to get them in the ground as soon as you can. They belong in the ground, not in the garage.

Planting location is very important. All daffodils need at least a half a day of sunshine each day. Early bloomers (Jan. and Feb) need full sun. Late bloomers like some afternoon shade. If you want to enjoy the blossoms from a particular viewing spot remember that daffodil flowers will face in the direction of predominant sunshine. So if you plant them on the south side of this location you will be looking at their backsides.

Soil is also important. Ordinary, neutral or nearly neutral, well drained sandy loam is best. Do not amend

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sandy soils with organic material. Daffodils do not want rich soil. You can lighten heavy clay soils with sand or perlite worked into the bed. Daffodils will rot if your soil is not well drained. If you have soggy ground, elevate your bed(s) and add sand or perlite. The soil should be free of tree and shrub roots. Dig deep (10") or double dig.

Plant your bulbs in clumps. Daffodils look best and grow better in clumps rather than long skinny rows. To achieve a "full" look in your bed space the bulbs at three times their width. That would be about twenty five large bulbs per square yard. Plant in a hole six inches deep. Smaller bulbs should be planted two to three times as deep as the bulb is tall. If they are a bit too shallow and the soil is not too heavy, most bulbs will pull themselves down into the soil. Never expose your bulbs to the sun for more than a few minutes. Heat will kill the flower bud within the bulb.

Never put fertilizer in the planting hole! When bulbs are initially planted in the fall, broadcast a little superphosphate over the bed. Around the first to middle of December, before the foliage breaks ground, broadcast a balanced fertilizer. If you have a fireplace, cover your bed with up to a half an inch of wood ashes. In future years, lightly fertilize in December. Do not use a high nitrogen fertilizer. Fertilize with 5-10-15 or with a 6-24-24 mixture used by Florida Daffodil Society members. Remember, when fertilizing daffodils "more is **not** better". Mulch your bed(s) with two to three inches of oak leaves or pine straw to keep the sun from cooking the bulbs. Do not use wood chips, they are hard for bulbs to come up through.

Be sure to water your beds in October and November when the bulbs are putting out roots. Check your soil and water every two weeks. Daffodils in bud and bloom require a lot of moisture. One inch per week is ideal when bulbs are in full growth and blooming. **DO NOT WATER BULBS AFTER BLOOMING.** Bulbs are dormant during the summer and watering can cause bulb rot.

For best year-round appearance, over-plant your daffodils with shallow-rooted perennials such as verbena and ox-eye daisies. Annuals like zinnias, marigolds, periwinkles, salvia, cucumbers, tomatoes and squash will not damage your daffodils and will hide the foliage as it becomes scruffy at the end of the season. The over planting also helps keep the soil temperature even. You can over-plant in the fall with pansies, petunias, dianthus and ryegrass

You can transplant your bulbs any time but generally they don't like to be moved. Since the bulbs will be multiplying it may be necessary to divide them every three to five years. Dig if there are four to five obvious sets of leaves, but only when the foliage is starting to die but is still visible. Do not pull the bulbs apart. When it's ready, a "slab" (baby bulb) will fall away from the "mother".

Weeding by hand helps aerate the soil. Do not use any pre-emergent herbicides and don't spray any weed control chemicals from October through June. Check the label to make sure that any chemicals you douse are safe for bulbs and break down quickly, especially in sandy soils.

Don't cut or braid the foliage, it should be allowed dry naturally. This provides nutrients to the bulb. If the foliage must be cut wait a full six weeks after blooming is finished, otherwise flowering may be diminished next year. This is another good argument for over-planting. Folks who have time to braid didn't plant enough daffodils!

For more information contact the Florida Daffodil Society at www.FlaDaff.com or join the Florida Daffodil Society, 7020 Apalachee Parkway , Tallahassee , FL 32311-4122.

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