

SOME WORTHY DAFFODILS

Rob Cole

There are more than 29,000 daffodil cultivars listed on the RHS International Registration Database, so these notes about some of my favourite varieties are based only upon those few I have grown over the years, which have performed well and are distinct.

I have a great fondness for the smaller species *Narcissus*, many of which I have raised from seed; often the only way to obtain them. My all-time favourite is *Narcissus cyclamineus*, a species like no other, growing only to about 150mm, and with a long narrow trumpet and petals swept back parallel to the trumpet. It really prefers an acid, moist soil, so whilst it is a challenge in our slightly alkaline clay, I have managed to keep some bulbs growing happily in a pot on the nursery.

Five other small species I have enjoyed the challenge of growing are *N. cordubensis*, *N. triandrus*, *N. rupicola*, *N. romieuxii* and *N. bulbocodium*, each of which is a delightful miniature daffodil for a cold greenhouse. They can easily be raised from seed and will flower in about three years from sowing. Most of my original seed has been sourced from the Alpine Garden Society seed exchange scheme.



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Narcissus cyclamineus



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N. bulbocodium



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N. 'Pink Charm'

Of the many larger cultivars which we have in the garden here at Meadow Farm, 'Pink Charm' is a sturdy and steadily increasing variety, white with an orange-pink flush to the end of the trumpet. From an initial ten bulbs it has clumped up every year and now fills an area of about four square metres, having been lifted and divided only twice

in the ten years we have been growing it. The colour is paler when it first emerges, darkens as it matures, and fades as it begins to go over. But I still think that it is the best of the pink-corona forms I have tried.

For a lovely all-white, go for 'Frostkist'; for a white with a startling, bright orange, shallow trumpet, try 'Redhill', and for a short yellow cultivar with a long, orange trumpet, 'Jetfire' is hard to beat and readily available at garden centres. The others are often obtainable through many of the specialist daffodil bulb suppliers.

Narcissus 'Tête-à-Tête' is so well known and easily and cheaply available, that it is easy to dismiss it simply because it is so common. But it is common because it is good! It was raised by Alec Gray in 1949, and he records that it came from a self-seeded pod of *Narcissus* 'Cyclataz'. There were three seeds in the pod; the other two were introduced as 'Quince' (1953) and 'Jumblie' (1952). However, it is 'Tête-à-Tête', a bulb Gray didn't think too much of to begin with, that is the most widely grown daffodil of all time, and is produced by the Dutch in millions every year. It is interesting to see that in his 1960 catalogue, Alec Gray listed bulbs at 4s 6d each, quite a hefty price at the time.



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N. 'Frostkist'



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N. 'Jetfire'



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N. 'Bartley'

But of all the daffodils we grow, the one I look forward to most each year is 'Bartley', an early flowering *N. cyclamineus* hybrid. Every year it is the first to flower (often at the end of February) and the longest lasting (often for five weeks). It was raised by J. C. Williams and was registered prior to 1934, but although it has been around for so long, it is not readily available. I bought ten bulbs for £6 from Walkers Bulbs in 2004, but have

never seen it offered anywhere since, not even by Walkers. It has a wonderfully long trumpet, flared at the mouth, and withstands all that the weather can throw at it so early in the year. I grow two other cultivars which are quite similar and more readily available - 'Peeping Tom' and 'Tweety Bird' - but neither is as good as 'Bartley', in my experience. If you see it offered anywhere, buy it...and buy me some, too!

If you have never visited a daffodil show, you are missing a real treat. The Daffodil Society Show is held each year over a weekend towards the end of April at Coughton Court, near Alcester in Warwickshire. I have been visiting the show for some years now and am always astounded at the variety and perfection on display. Many of the varieties on show are not generally available in the retail trade and have often been raised by the enthusiastic exhibitors themselves, specifically to meet the exacting requirements of the show judges, but there are many that can also be easily obtained by mail order from a range of specialist bulb suppliers who feed the lust of daffodil fanciers.

Finally, if you get hooked, one of the best websites for identifying daffodil cultivars, discovering their origins, and finding descriptions and photographs is www.daffseek.org - a site to which I constantly refer for information.

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