

# Daffodils

## *regional proven performers*

BY MARY LOU GRIPSHOVER



many years and will continue to increase, or perennialize.

### DAFFODIL CLASSIFICATION

Daffodils have been separated into 13 divisions based on flower form. The system is too detailed to be outlined in this article, but for those who are interested, a full description of the classification system will be provided through a link to this article on the AHS website ([www.ahs.org](http://www.ahs.org)).

In general, the cyclamineus hybrids in Division 6 and the trumpet daffodils in Division 1 bloom early in the season. Short-cupped daffodils in Division 3 are later-season bloomers, and poeticus hybrids in Division 9 usually end the daffodil display.

### MAKING CHOICES

With all the daffodils available—more than 25,000 cultivar names have been registered and hundreds are available each year in catalogs or at local stores—perhaps the most difficult task a gardener faces is selecting which cultivars to grow.

One way to ensure you choose excellent daffodils is to select cultivars that have won the American Daffodil Society's John and Gertrude Wister Award (see sidebar, page 22), given for excellence as a garden plant. Among the requirements for award winners are that they should perform well in most regions of the country. They also must be vigorous plants that have attractive, long-lasting flowers. The flowers should be reasonably sunfast so that colors don't become bleached out or the edges of the cups—or coronas—"burn" and become dry and crisp. Thirty-three daffodils have received the award since it was established, the most recent being the 2011 winner 'Barrett Browning', a white-and-orange, small-cupped daffodil.

Few plants herald the arrival of spring like the cheerful blooms of daffodils. Experts from the American Daffodil Society share their recommendations for cultivars that will thrive in different regions of North America.

**F**OR MANY of us, daffodils are the flower of spring, the flower of hope, the flower that says, "Yes, winter is over." They also belong to one of the few plant genera that gardeners in all regions of the United States can grow successfully. Mind you, that's not to say that all daffodils will grow in all regions, but there are some daffodils that will grow in all regions; it's just a matter of selecting the ones that will thrive where you live.

Daffodils (*Narcissus* spp.) are among the easiest plants to grow, which makes

them a great choice for beginning gardeners and for introducing children to gardening. For more experienced gardeners, this large, diverse genus offers plenty of opportunities to explore ways to use them creatively in garden design or to experiment with breeding their own unique selections.

Another great reason to grow daffodils: Deer don't eat them. Neither do squirrels, moles, voles, rabbits, or any other critters. And once planted, the bulbs can remain in the same location for

**Daffodils planted in masses make a spectacular showing, as in this woodland garden. For the best effect, choose a single cultivar.**



**'Barrett Browning' is the 2011 winner of the American Daffodil Society Wister Award.**

With a focus on Wister award winners, backed up by advice from American Daffodil Society (ADS) members in various regions, here are some recommendations for specific daffodil selections that are known to flourish in different regions of the country.

### PACIFIC NORTHWEST

Gardeners in the Pacific Northwest enjoy the perfect climate for daffodils and will be successful with nearly all selections. An exception may be some of the tazettas (Division 8), which often send up foliage in the fall.

Some of the best daffodils in this region have been bred by Elise and Dick Havens, the owners of Mitsch Daffodils, a nursery in Hubbard, Oregon. Their 'Rapture', with its beautifully swept-back



**The backward-facing petals of 'Rapture' give it a unique windswept look.**



**'Sweetness' is a good choice for warmer regions, such as Southern California and the Deep South.**

yellow petals, blooms early in the season and is the only daffodil to have won both the Wister Award for garden performance and the ADS's Pannill Award as an outstanding exhibition flower.

'Stratosphere' is a tall daffodil with yellow petals and a short orange cup and several blooms to the stem. In some climates it looks more like an all yellow flower. It blooms later in the season and was the first to win the Wister Award, in 1985.

'Accent', a breakthrough flower in 1960 for white-and-pink daffodils, won the award in 1987, the second flower to be so honored. This is a flower that opens with pink color, and—unlike with some

selections—you don't have to use your imagination to call it pink.

### SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA AND THE SOUTH

In warmer regions of the United States, such as southern California and some parts of the South, the tazettas steal the show beginning in late December or January. The tazettas offer the added bonus of fragrance, but it can be a bit overwhelming, and gardeners tend to either love it or hate it.

For those who live in warmer regions, I suggest trying 'Falconet', which Phil Huey, a member of the Texas Daffodil Society, describes as fabulous. This yellow-and-red

## DAFFODIL GROWING GUIDELINES

Many of the cultivars described in this article will not be available at local nurseries, so you'll need to rely on the mail-order sources listed on page 23. Order your bulbs early—by the end of June at the latest. Early orders are shipped first, so there's less chance of the grower being out of the bulbs you want. Avoid mixtures; a large group of the same cultivar will look better and bloom simultaneously.

In most areas, plant daffodils about twice as deep as the bulb is tall—about five to six inches. The distance apart is really dependent on your garden plan. If you are naturalizing them, plant them 12 inches or so apart; it may look sparse at first, but the bulbs will multiply and soon you'll have a field of color. If you want to create clumps of them in your garden beds, plant them five or six inches apart.

Daffodils thrive in sites where they receive at least a half day of sun, but they can be grown under deciduous trees because they progress through much of their active growth before the trees fully leaf out. They're not particular about soil type—either loam or clay is fine as long as it drains freely; soggy soils can cause bulb rot. They grow best with access to

regular moisture during active growth, which is from early fall until the foliage turns yellow the following spring.

When planting new bulbs, mix a balanced fertilizer (6-10-10 or 10-10-10 is good) into the soil beneath the bulbs. On established plantings, broadcast fertilizer with a low-nitrogen content in spring and fall. If you fertilize only once a year, do it in the fall, because that's when the bulbs are making new root growth.

To ensure daffodils bloom heartily from year to year, it's important to leave the foliage intact after blooming because this is when photosynthesis is most active, creating next year's blooms. Resist the urge to cut the foliage to ground level, tie it up, or fold it over and put a rubber band around it; just leave it in place until it yellows naturally. Camouflage it with annuals—marigolds are good—or other perennials such as daylilies.

If the number of blooms drops off after a few years, the bulbs are telling you they're crowded and need to be dug up, divided, and replanted (you can also share a few with friends or neighbors). Given space and a year or two to grow back to blooming size, they'll again repay you with beautiful blooms.

—M.L.G.

selection is a cross between a tazetta and *N. jonquilla* and has three to five or more florets per stem. Another good choice for this region is 'Ice Follies', which is one of the most widely-grown daffodils. It has an industrial-strength constitution that makes it ideal for mass public plantings or large drifts. It goes through an interesting color change, opening white and yellow, with

the cup becoming creamy white as the flower matures.

'Sweetness' blooms early and has a fragrance to match its name. The smallish yellow flowers usually come just one to a stem, but occasionally there are two.

Yellow-and-orange 'Tahiti', which received the Wister Award in 2003, is the only double that re-blooms consistently in

Texas. Double daffodils, especially older ones, sometimes "blast," or fail to open properly, when weather conditions fluctuate. I haven't seen any scientific research to explain this, but it seems to happen when there's a change either from nice cool weather to unusually warm, or vice versa.

There's a widespread perception that daffodils won't grow in Florida unless they



'Falconet', left, and double-flowered 'Tahiti', right, have both proven to be successful selections in warm regions such as Texas.



Dainty miniature 'Hawera', left, combines well with brightly colored pansies. Another Wister Award winner, 'Accent', above, was one of the first pink-and-white daffodils.

are forced, but that's not the case. The late John Van Beck, who lived in the Tallahassee area, discovered that with the proper selection of cultivars, it's possible to have five months of daffodil bloom in Florida and South Georgia. His wife, Linda, continues to grow daffodils and the couple's recommendations, which are included in a book co-authored by Linda Van Beck (see "Resources," page 23), include Wister winners such as 'Accent' and 'Barrett Browning'.

Other good choices include 'Brackenhurst' and one of its parents, 'Ceylon', share the same yellow-and-orange color scheme. 'Saint Keverne', a lovely all-yellow flower, is a Historic Daffodil, which in ADS circles means it was bred or in gardens before 1940. The miniature 'Hawera', with its several pendent all-yellow florets is a little charmer. If you like fragrant, smaller flowers, try 'Quail', which bears several small-cupped yellow blooms per stem.

In northern Georgia, big, bold, vigorous 'Bravoure' flourishes. This large white-and-yellow trumpet daffodil puts on a big show in mid-season. For very early flowers, you can't go wrong with 'Peeping Tom', a cyclamineus hybrid in Division 6. The bold, long trumpet with its narrow, slightly reflexed petals makes a welcome patch of gold in the garden. Another very early bloomer is 'Monal', with yellow petals and a large, bright red cup.

#### UPPER MIDWEST AND MOUNTAIN STATES

The cold winters and short growing season in the Upper Midwest and some Mountain states don't deter daffodils, but they bloom later than elsewhere. In places where the ground freezes early, like Minnesota, bulbs should also be planted earlier so they have time to set roots before the ground freezes solid. To be safe, plant bulbs before October 15, and for added protection, mulch the ground above the bulbs once the ground freezes.

Mary Durtschi, whose garden in Stockton, Utah, is an ADS Display Garden, says she has occasionally planted bulbs as late as December 15 in beds that had already been prepared, and then covered with a thick layer of straw. Among her favorites are 'Rapture', 'Fragrant Rose', 'Ceylon', and 'Bravoure'.

Good choices for cold-climate gardens include 'Golden Aura', an all-yellow, large-cupped daffodil that blooms in late mid-season and makes a good show in the garden. It also makes its way to the exhibition table now and again. The same can be said of 'Misty Glen', which is all white with a green eye. Neither flower is large, but they bloom reliably.

'Merlin' is a late-blooming, short-cupped flower with white petals and a small, almost disc-shaped yellow cup edged with red. It's a medium-sized flower that will benefit from a little afternoon shade.

'Segovia' is one of the larger miniatures, being almost two inches in diameter and about a foot tall. When it's happy, it makes a nice clump in the garden, and almost always makes it to the show table as well. Its white-and-yellow, small-cupped flowers are borne singly.

#### MID-ATLANTIC

From the Ohio Valley across to the mid-



Miniature 'Peeping Tom', here keeping company with trout lilies (*Erythronium* 'Pagoda'), is a cheery-looking, early-blooming daffodil.

## JOHN AND GERTRUDE WISTER GARDEN AWARD

The American Daffodil Society (ADS) sponsors an award program that recognizes outstanding daffodil selections. The award program, which debuted in 1980, is named the John and Gertrude Wister Garden Award in honor of two influential members of the ADS.

A renowned landscape architect and horticulturist, John C. Wister (1887–1982) was a charter member of the ADS and the third recipient of its Gold Medal, in 1961. He graduated from Harvard University and studied at the Harvard School of Landscape Architecture and the New Jersey Agricultural College.

Wister had broad horticultural interests and involvement. He was secretary of the American Rose Society for many years and was a member of some 50 horticultural societies—including the American Horticultural Society (AHS)—and 30 scientific and conservation organizations. He was the first director of the Arthur Hoyt Scott Horticultural Foundation and designed and created the Scott Arboretum at Swarthmore College in Pennsylvania, which now encompasses 300 acres.

Wister was the author of four books: *The Iris*, *Lilac Culture*, *Bulbs for American Gardens*, and *Four Seasons in Your Garden*. He was also the first horticulturist to receive five major American horticultural awards: The Liberty Hyde Bailey Award presented by the AHS; the Scott Medal; the American Peony Society's A. P. Saunders Memorial Medal; the Honor and Achievement Award of the International Lilac Society; and the Gold Medal of the American Daffodil Society.

You can find a complete list of Wister winners on the ADS website (see "Resources," opposite page).

—M.L.G.

Atlantic states, growing conditions for daffodils are good, and most selections will flourish. I garden in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area, and one of my favorites is 'Fragrant Rose', a white-and-pink, large-cupped daffodil that is a mid- to late-season bloomer with a roselike fragrance. Besides being a great addition to a garden, it's also a frequent winner at daffodil shows.

The yellow-and-orange, double variety 'Crackington' is another frequent show-winner. The petals and sepals open orange, becoming paler as the flower matures, while the rows of yellow petals lay in perfect symmetry, one row of progressively smaller petals atop another. 'Dainty Miss' is an all-white, small flower—about two-and-a-quarter inches in diameter—which grows about 12 inches tall. A perfectly formed and larger version of its parent, *N. rupicola* subsp. *watieri*, it blooms in late mid-season.

The only split corona to have gained the Wister Award is 'Tripartite'. This all-yellow flower usually comes with two to three dancing blooms per stem, with the



Suited for the mid-Atlantic region, 'Intrigue' was introduced by daffodil breeder William Pannill.

cup split into six segments lying back against the perianth. It blooms late in the season. 'Camelot' is a sturdy, large-cupped, all-yellow flower that not only makes a beautiful display in the garden, but is the parent of more than 125 other daffodils, so if you have any interest in breeding your own daffodils, take note. Its foliage remains green well into June here in the Ohio Valley.

William Pannill, considered the dean of amateur daffodil hybridizers in the United States, gardens in Martinsville, Virginia. Among the many daffodils he's introduced, he's particularly proud of 'Intrigue', a lovely reverse bicolor. "I think it has dual value for show and garden," says Pannill. Late in the season, its two or three blooms to a stem open lemon-yellow, with the cup maturing to white. Like most jonquil hybrids, it has a fine scent. Another Pannill introduction is

'Chromacolor', which has a large flower, and is described as "an improved 'Accent' of deeper color." It's now being mass-produced for commercial sale.

Another good choice for the mid-Atlantic region is 'Resplendent', a Grant Mitsch hybrid that bears a large, tall flower with yellow petals and a vivid orange-red cup. It blooms in mid-season here under deciduous trees, which offer some protection against the sun burning the cup.

#### FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

With so many amateur and professional breeders working on developing new daffodils, you can expect to see a steady stream of selections with improved characteristics such as color, longer blooming season, and disease resistance. Breeders are also striving to extend the range of daffodils into regions where they have not previously been successfully cultivat-

## Sources

**Bill the Bulb Baron**, Santa Cruz, CA. (831) 236-8397.

[www.billthebulbbaron.com](http://www.billthebulbbaron.com).

**Brent and Becky's Bulbs**, Gloucester, VA. (877) 661-2852.

[www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com](http://www.brentandbeckysbulbs.com).

**John Scheepers**, Bantam, CT. (860) 567-0838. [www.johnscheepers.com](http://www.johnscheepers.com).

**Mitsch Novelty Daffodils**, Hubbard, OR. (503) 651-2742.

[www.mitschdaffodils.com](http://www.mitschdaffodils.com).

**Nancy Wilson Miniature Daffodils**, Garberville, CA. (707) 923-2407.

[www.asis.com/~nwilson](http://www.asis.com/~nwilson).

**Old House Gardens**, Ann Arbor, MI. (734) 995-1486.

[www.oldhousegardens.com](http://www.oldhousegardens.com).

## Resources

**The American Daffodil Society**, P.O.

Box 522, Hawkinsville, GA

31026-0522. [www.daffodilusa.org](http://www.daffodilusa.org).

■ Members receive quarterly issues of *The Daffodil Journal*, an invitation to the annual convention, and the opportunity to become an accredited daffodil judge. The ADS website offers daffodil information and links to daffodil societies and shows. Photos of all the Wister winners, as well as thousands of other daffodils, may be seen at [www.daffseek.org](http://www.daffseek.org).

**Daffodils** by Theodore James, Clyde Wachsberger, Harry Haralambou. Harry N. Abrams, Inc., New York, New York, 2004.

**Daffodils for North American Gardens** by Becky and Brent Heath. Bright Sky Press, Houston, Texas, 2002.

**Daffodils in Florida: A Field Guide to the Coastal South** by Linda and Sara Van Beck, 2004 (available through the ADS website).

ed. One of the more exciting developments is work currently underway in southern California to create a line of fall-blooming daffodils. Now that's really something to look forward to. 🌼

*Mary Lou Gripshover is a past president of the American Daffodil Society. She gardens in the Cincinnati, Ohio, area.*