

Daffodils- plant once and enjoy them forever  
by Paul Thompson, County Extension Agent

Have you ever been riding down a country road in the spring and passed by clumps of daffodils growing by the roadside, or maybe under a group of oak trees in the middle of a pasture? The oaks and the daffodils might be the only evidence left of an old home site. Daffodils are by far the most dependable and long-lasting bulbs that we can grow in the South to provide many years, if not generations of low maintenance flower power. Another great thing about daffodils is that squirrels and deer will not eat them.

There are many different species and hybrids of daffodils with some doing better in cooler climates, and many that are adapted to the warmer winters of the South. All the daffodils, other than the paper whites, have to go through cool winter temperatures in the soil to properly grow and flower the following spring.

There are many different cultivated daffodils that have been divided into 13 divisions based on their species and flower characteristics. The following are some of the more common divisions:

**Jonquil** daffodils are noted primarily for their fragrance. These daffodils normally produce more than one flower per stem, usually two to six blossoms, and very narrow, dark-green leaves. They are known for naturalizing extremely well. Unlike some daffodils, which prefer a cooler climate, all Jonquils do very well in the Deep South.

**Trumpet** daffodils have the "traditional" daffodil form: there is one large blossom per stem and the trumpet is as long or longer than the petals. These daffodils are noted for their long blooming season, and their very large blossoms. They look particularly good when planted in large masses and are also excellent at naturalizing. They are widely available.

**Long Cup** daffodils are one of the most popular and widely available groups. They have a full range of colors in white, many shades of yellow, pink, orange, and red, and a wide variety of cup shapes: ruffled, trumpet-like or flat. They will give many years of blooming.

**Double** daffodils will have a doubled trumpet, doubled petals, and sometimes doubles of both giving you a flower that looks much like a carnation. The flowers are very showy, but I have found the flower stalks tend to lay over more due to the extra weight – especially after rain.

**Cyclamineus** daffodils have blossoms with a straight slender trumpet and flared-back (reflexed) petals. Some varieties strongly resemble a cyclamen flower. They are beautiful and graceful and are among the very first hybrid daffodils to bloom in the spring. In addition, they tolerate shade and heavy, damp soil better than most other daffodils do.

**Tazettas** produce several blossoms per stem, at a minimum three or four but up to 20. They are particularly good for planting in the South. Here they make excellent perennials. In addition, Tazetta daffodils almost always have a very sweet, musky fragrance.

**Poeticus** (Poet's) daffodils feature large white petals with small, dainty cups in contrasting colors. They all naturalize beautifully. Some are known to have been growing in the same garden, with very little care, for generations! They are one of the last daffodils to begin flowering and most varieties have a delightfully spicy fragrance.

Regardless of which ones you choose, there are some planting and maintenance tips to follow:

- Planting time is November and December.
- Follow the planting instructions on the label, but the rule of thumb is the depth of the hole is three times the height of the bulb. For example, a large, two-inch daffodil bulb would be planted in a hole that was six inches deep.
- After flowering, the plant needs its leaves so that it can produce the energy needed to store in the bulb and emerge the following year. Wait until they are uniformly brown over half of their length before cutting back the foliage – usually after six to eight weeks.

- With existing daffodils, use a soil test to determine phosphorus needs instead of blindly piling on the bone meal. Phosphorus levels are usually adequate in our soils. If fertilizer is needed, apply in the early spring just as the leaves are emerging.
- Daffodils which produce large bulbs may have to be divided after a few years to keep them flowering. If, over the years, your clumps seem to have noticeably less flowers, you can dig, divide, and replant them in late spring when most of the foliage is yellowing.

For more information on daffodils and other spring flowering bulbs see the fact sheet from the Clemson Home & Garden Information Center <https://hgic.clemson.edu/factsheet/spring-flowering-bulbs/>.