

GOLDEN DAFFODILS

*Never allow the bulbs
which yield these
glorious blooms to get
too 'comfortable'*

Chris Heavey

lecturer at the Teagasc College in the National Botanic Gardens.

Iwandered lonely as a cloud that floats on high o'er vales and hills when all at once I saw a crowd a host of golden daffodils" everyone's favourite poem with its origins in the English countryside about a beautiful and versatile flower that has its origins in Spain and Portugal.

Daffodils announce the beginnings of spring with a flood of yellow. Whether you have a pot or an acre to plant up, the humble daffodil perfectly fits the bill. The choice is huge when it comes to daffs and better still you can be assured of colour from January right through until Easter by choosing a mix of varieties.

The tall statuesque trumpeter demands your undivided attention, while the tiny bulbacodium nod shyly in the spring breeze,

hardly daring to look up. Yellows and blues are a match made in heaven so why not use hyacinth and perhaps forget-me-nots to show off these yellow beauties to best advantage. Both planters and gardens need a little perfume at this time of the year and daffodils such as paper whites pack a punch in the perfume department.

Propagation

Daffodils don't seed themselves naturally in the Irish climate, but they do multiply easily by creating small bulblets around the edges of the larger flowering bulbs. This allows daffodils to spread in a natural way; something similar to the way they naturally disperse themselves on the prairies of central Spain.

It is said that the best way to position bulbs for planting in the garden is to throw a handful up in the air and plant them where they fall – it actually works quite well.

Nine billion bulbs are produced in Holland alone each year and sent around the world. These are of all types and varieties. This means a wonderful range of characteristics and sizes is available to us: single, double, scented and toned flowers and miniature, medium and tall plants.

Cross pollination and production of new daffodil varieties is something that has been prac-

ticed by growers and amateurs alike for centuries. The catch is that it takes about seven years from seed for a bulb to flower.

Blindness in clumps is when daffodils fail to flower and only produce green leaves. The depth we plant at is key in preventing this. When planting the bulbs, it is very important that they are planted deeply to a depth of at least 9in/225mm. This protects the bulbs and, to a certain extent, stresses them into flowering early and prolifically over a long period of time.

However, it is important to recognise the signs of blindness in daffodils which have been planted a long time in one place. To deal with this problem, we should dig up our bulbs every nine or 10 years and move them about or spread them around. This causes the bulb to not get too comfortable in one place and makes them flower better.

So, plan ahead and when your daffodils are finished flowering this spring, dig them up and spread them around. Then expect to encounter spring in all its glorious and abundant yellow next year.

