

DAFFODIL GROWING



Daffodils are spring classics, with their bright colours after the winter gloom. From the earliest jonquils to the later season varieties, their flowering time extends over two months.

PLANTING

Daffodils can be planted any time from mid March to the end of May. Planting time makes little difference to the eventual flowering time as this is dependant mainly on winter cold and spring warmth.

Daffodils need full sun and well-drained soil. Plant them with about 10cm of soil over the top of the bulbs, but cultivate the soil deeply before planting to allow easy root development.

Miniature daffodils generally have smaller bulbs and should be planted with about 6cm of soil over the top.

Water the bulbs in, but no fertiliser needs to be added now, as the bulbs will only be putting out roots in the coming months.

AFTER PLANTING

Nothing much will be seen for a few months after planting, but beneath the ground the bulbs will be busy developing their roots and flower buds, ready for spring growth.

The first leaves will emerge in mid to late winter, and little care is needed at this stage. Some slug repellent will help prevent damage from slugs and snails, they love the tender new flower buds and can cause a lot of damage. You can also fertilise lightly at this time, to boost the pring growth.

When the weather gets warmer, virus-spreading aphids may become active. Occasional spraying with a Neem spray will keep them under control.

If you're picking your daffodils, do so as the first petals start to open, the flower will continue to open in the vase.

AFTER FLOWERING

Sprinkle some Neem granules on the soil where the leaves emerge to help keep narcissus flies away. These target daffodils and hyacinths to lay their eggs, which will hatch and burrow down to eat out the inside of the bulbs.

The bulbs will put all their energy into producing flowers so they can diversify through seed. Remove the old flower heads to prevent seed development. This will encourage better bulb growth and stronger flowering the following year.

Fertilise lightly, working it into the topsoil. Use a general-purpose fertiliser or a special bulb fertiliser. Compost and old animal manure are useful, but don't use fresh animal manure as it has too much nitrogen, which can encourage disease. Good bulb fertilisers are high in potassium to enhance flower colour, and low in nitrogen.

Resist the temptation to tidy up and remove the leaves, the bulbs need these now to take back the nutrients for storage. Allow them to die back naturally and remove them only when they have gone dry.

LONG TERM CARE

Daffodils can be left in the ground for up to four or five years before they become too crowded. If a clump is producing a lot of leaves but not many flowers, dig the bulbs in December when they are dormant. After drying the bulbs for a couple of weeks, split the offsets apart and store them in a cool airy place before replanting in autumn.

