Daffodils
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This year the calendar reported March 20 as the first day of spring. Many of us may have felt spring started this weekend with the pleasant temperatures and sunshine. To me, spring has not begun until I see daffodils blooming in the neighborhood.

Flat, linear green shoots began to emerge from buried bulbs three to four weeks ago depending on the location in a yard. The time between shoot emergence and flowering each year varies, depending on the accumulation of warming temperatures.

Individuals often ask is the proper name: daffodils, narcissus, or jonquil. All flowers in this group have the same genus name: Narcissus, so they all could be correctly called narcissus. Daffodil would be the correct common name for all types grown in our area.

Jonquil is a specific type of narcissus and the name should not be used interchangeably with daffodil. The plants are different. Leaves are reed-like rather than flat. The flowers tend to be smaller and fragrant. Jonquils are also only adapted to the warmer climate of the southern U.S.

Daffodil flowers are unique in shape: a central tubular, bell-shaped section surrounded by a ring or petals. The tubular section is called a trumpet if it is longer than the petals or a cup if shorter. Daffodils are classified into 13 major divisions based on tubular variation and flower color.

Daffodils should receive a small amount of fertilizer in the spring. A bulb fertilizer may be used or a fertilizer that has phosphorus and potassium but little to no nitrogen. A common practice is to sprinkle a tablespoon of fertilizer near the base of the plant.

Flowers do not need to be removed after flowering (deadheading). Leaves should not be removed until they have turned yellow to brown. They generally remain green four to six weeks after flowering. Leaves are needed to produce food for the underground bulbs.

Removing the leaves too soon will reduce to number and size of flowers the following spring. Some gardeners braid or tie up leaves to make the bed look ‘more tidy’ after flowering; however, this will reduce the leaf surface area available for photosynthesis and may affect food production for the bulbs.

Daffodils may need to be dug and divided every five to 10 years. Visual clues for digging would be reduced flower size and number of blooms. Dig the bulbs when the foliage is brown and still attached to easily locate bulbs. A garden fork is the best digging tool to prevent bulb damage.
Dug bulbs should not be left on the ground in the hot sun. Soil should be removed and bulbs allowed to dry in shallow trays, onion sacks, or old nylon stockings. Drying should occur in a cool, well-ventilated space for several weeks. After the drying process, remove old skins and roots. Offsets (bulblets) may be removed from the main bulb at this time if they can be easily separated. Bulbs should be stored in a cool, dry location in shallow trays or porous sacks until fall planting time.

If you do not have daffodils in your yard or gardens, now is a good time to look at your landscape to determine where you might want to add them this fall. Sites should be well drained.

Daffodils are great in shrub borders, perennial beds, and interspersed in groundcovers. They will add color in front of evergreens. Daffodils should be planted in groups of three to twelve bulbs for the best effect.

Besides their beauty, daffodils are easy to plant and maintain. Squirrels do not bother the bulbs since they are toxic.

Regardless whether you plan to plant daffodils later this year, enjoy their beauty this spring. I especially like the traditional yellow daffodil.