

Wordsworth's Daffodils
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"I wandered lonely as a cloud
That floats on high o'er vales and hills,
When all at once I saw a crowd
A host of dancing daffodils;
Along the lake, beneath the trees,
Ten thousand dancing in the breeze."

Imagine a flash mob of 10,000 daffodils! As Romantic poet William Wordsworth wandered the hills of Grasmere, England so long ago, enjoying what must have been a spectacular sight; many of us, in hopes of creating a similar display are pondering bulb offerings and preparing our gardens. It is that time of year when gardeners plant bulbs; lots of them. But let's shine a spotlight on the daffodil.

Of the family *Narcissus*, the deer resistant daffodil is originally from Spain and Portugal. It requires full sun and well-drained soil. Because most of the root growth occurs in the fall and early winter, planting daffodils in fall when the ground has cooled and before the first freeze is best. Prepare your beds with a low nitrogen fertilizer worked into the soil, but do not allow the bulbs to come in contact with it. Standard sized bulbs should be planted about six inches deep.

Come spring, take pleasure in your personal flash mob of daffodils. Take pictures! But take note: once the blossoms have disappeared, leave the foliage until it has yellowed and dried up. Why? Experiments have shown that cutting the foliage results in substantial bulb loss. You see, next year's blooms begin to form in the bulbs immediately after blooming. Cutting the foliage will foil next year's blossoms. However, if the fading foliage is too much to bear, try companion plantings. Overseeding the bulbs with poppies, asters, larkspur, snapdragon, or calendula will help. These plants emerge as the daffodils are dissipating and draw your attention away from the saddened foliage. Ornamental grasses, daylilies, peonies, and crocosmia are good companion choices as well.

Whether it's 30 or 10,000 daffodils dancing in your spring garden, prepare your beds well. Your rewards will arrive just when you begin believing that another day of rain would be unbearable. Daffodils, with their sunshiny blooms will come to the rescue.