

NARCISSUS TAZETTA
DROUGHT TOLERANT BULBS FOR THE BAY AREA

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Bulbs

In botany, a geophyte or bulb, is a short stem with fleshy leaves or leaf bases that function as food storage organs during dormancy. The underground storage organs of bulbs expend their food and water storage to produce the leaves and flowers. It is these underground food and water storage organs that allow these plants to resist drought.

Bulbous plant species cycle through vegetative and reproductive growth stages; the bulb grows to flowering size during the vegetative stage and the plant flowers during the reproductive stage. During the wet season, bulbs replenish their resources from soil nutrients and photosynthesis. During the hot, dry season, bulbs go dormant storing their accumulated food supply while showing little to no sign of life above ground. In autumn or spring the plants sprout again to continue the cycle.

It is these characteristics which make many bulbous plants suitable for our Mediterranean climate of mild, wet winters and then hot, dry summers.

Narcissus

For many, daffodils are the flower of spring, the harbinger of warmer weather and longer days. They belong to one of the few plant genera that gardeners in all regions of the United States can grow successfully. That's not to say that all daffodils will grow in all regions; it's just a matter of selecting the ones that will thrive in a particular climate zone.

Narcissus is a genus of predominantly spring perennial plants in the Amaryllidaceae (amaryllis) family. *Narcissus* has conspicuous flowers with six petal-like tepals surmounted by a cup or trumpet-shaped corona. The flowers are generally white or yellow (orange or pink in garden varieties), with either uniform or contrasting coloured tepals and corona.

Narcissus were well known in ancient civilizations. The species are native to meadows and woods in southwest Europe and North Africa with a center of diversity in the Western Mediterranean, particularly the Iberian peninsula. Both wild and cultivated plants have naturalised widely, and were introduced into the Far East prior to the tenth century. Narcissi tend to be long-lived bulbs, which propagate by division, but are also insect-pollinated. Known pests, diseases and disorders include viruses, fungi, the larvae of flies, mites and nematodes.

Although known by many names such as daffadowny, daffadilly, *Narcissus* is the botanical name for the group, daffodil the common name, and jonquil a name for the small species, *N. jonquilla*. The Royal Horticultural Society separates *Narcissus* into thirteen divisions based upon flower form. In the Bay Area, Division #8, the Tazettas are consistently the longest living and most prolific.

Division #8 Tazetta

Tazettas are the most widely distributed and the oldest known forms of the *Narcissus* genus. They were cultivated and known in ancient Greece, Egypt, and Rome. They are native to the Mediterranean Basin.

Tazettas are bunch or cluster-flowering daffodils with a sturdy stem. They have 3 to 15 florets per stem rather than the one flower per stem of most daffodils. Because Tazettas can have up to 25 florets per stem, they are also often called *Narcissus Polyanthos*. The flowers are very short cupped as well as very fragrant. Some consider the fragrance intoxicating while others find it offensive. Each type has a distinctive fragrance so it can be easy to find one that is appealing.

Tazettas grow best in Mediterranean climates as they require no cold period. They are not too particular about soil requirements doing well in fairly acid (5pH) to above neutral soils. This group includes the best daffodils for forcing, including the Paperwhites.

The Tazetta, Chinese Sacred Lily, has a long history in California. It was brought by Chinese immigrants to California during the Gold Rush period. Botanically, these daffodils are *Narcissus tazetta laticolor*. The flowers are used in Chinese New Year Celebrations and are considered sacred. It is

believed that the Single Chinese Narcissus were originally spread east by travelers along the Silk Route, since the flowers are found growing all along it. They also grow along the coasts and rivers of China, possibly being spread by traders or perhaps by floods.

Growing Requirements

Tazettas are perfectly suited for the Bay Area as they love a good summer baking, need no chill period, and our long arid summers keep the dormant bulbs dry and help prevent basal rot.

Tazettas are easy to grow and tough. They should be planted in well draining soil about 6-8 inches deep. It is especially important to plant the bulbs deep if you want to put annuals over them during their dormant months. These bulbs will thrive without any additional summer water, although some varieties can tolerate summer irrigation. With careful choice of varieties, Tazettas can bloom in the garden from November through March.

The most important thing for successful bulb growth is to make sure that the foliage is left to die naturally. To ensure daffodils bloom heartily from year to year, it's crucial to leave the foliage intact after blooming because this is when photosynthesis is most active, creating next year's blooms. Resist the urge to cut the foliage to ground level, tie it up, or fold it over and put a rubber band around it; just leave it in place until it yellows naturally. At least six weeks after the flowers have died is the rule of thumb although longer is better. Camouflage the dying foliage with annuals or other perennials such as daylilies.

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