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Daffodil Dreams

These spring beauties capture a Midwesterner's heart—
and he's happy to share that infatuation with everyone he meets.



Jason
Delaney



Narcissus 'Catalyst'



Narcissus 'Pappy George'

Jason Delaney has never met a daffodil he didn't like. As the youngest horticulturist at one of the oldest botanical gardens in the country, the Missouri Botanical Gardens in St. Louis, he's responsible for the planting of nearly 100,000 bulbs—including daffodils, lilies, daylilies, tulips, hyacinths, and crocuses—throughout the 79-acre garden, which is visited by more than a million people a year. "We're talking about all kinds of bulbs," explains 29-year-old Jason, "from the common tulips and hyacinths to the more exotic of the daffodils and lilies, and the rare,



“I like all daffodils, and there are so many, each with its own story and personality.” —Jason Delaney, horticulturist

endangered types that find homes only in such institutions as our own.”

As a boy growing up in Illinois, Jason, who was, as he says, “raised by rural mail-order gardening folks,” became so intrigued by the daffodils growing in his grandparents’ garden that he couldn’t wait for the flowers to unfurl each spring. As soon as the bulbs started to sport buds, he’d carefully peel them open to see what color and variety of daffodil they would reveal. Then, he’d unearth the bulb to see what it looked like. “By age 7,” he says, “I could distinguish from just looking at the stem and bud what kind of daffodil it would be.”

Jason’s early fascination for these hardworking bulbs has blossomed into a full-time passion. Since joining the staff at the botanical garden, he has increased the number of daffodil varieties grown there from 29 to more than 500. Jason also promotes daffodils to home gardeners. He sings the praises of the 30,000 registered varieties and the possibilities they offer: double trumpets, frilled edges, multiple blooms, short cups, or long cups—in salmon, pink, cream, yellow, orange, and various mixtures thereof. “I like all daffodils,”



Narcissus 'Bandesara'



Narcissus 'Shrike'



Narcissus 'Color Magic'

Opposite A serpentine border winds its way through the shady backyard where Jason grows his daffodils. It's filled to overflowing with a colorful assortment of newer daffodil hybrid varieties that were later harvested and displayed at The American Daffodil Society's annual convention in St. Louis, which included tours of this garden at Chick and Bruce Buehrig's home.

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Jason admits, “and there are so many, each with its own story and personality, it’s hard to choose favorites. There is a look or style to suit every need.”

He echoes that message away from work as president of the Greater St. Louis Daffodil Society and with his personal daffodil collection, which includes more than 2,000 varieties. Because he lives in a city apartment, Jason plants many of his daffodils in a 2-acre woodland garden owned by fellow daffodil enthusiasts Chick and Bruce Buehrig. “I met Chick about 10 years ago during my summer internship at the botanical gardens,” Jason explains. “Soon after, I was ‘adopted’ by her and her husband, and to this day I still consider them my St. Louis mom and dad.”

He shares with them the daffodil hybrids he develops in a painstaking process that can take up to 10 years. “Watching and nurturing my endeavors as they grow into something successful gives me pleasure,” he says. “Gardening is such a terrific challenge on so many levels, with each season of each year being a new canvas for creativity.”

For more information, see the Buyers’ Guide on page 101.



Above “Despite what the casual observer might say,” Jason explains, “no two daffodils are alike. In early spring, I look for the rugged, old-fashioned types to herald in the season. Throughout the season, I have a penchant for the frilly, if not the garish garden daffodils with their outrageous beauty. Later, I seek out those with intense fragrance.” Here, an unnamed clump of daffodils brightens the Buehrig landscape.



Narcissus
‘Gateway to Spring’



Narcissus ‘Innovator’



What does Jason look for in a daffodil? "Everything—growing ability, increase, weather resistance, saturation of color, breeding worth, fragrance—the sky's the limit," he says. Here are a dozen of his favorites.

Tips for Bulb Buyers

Even though spring-blooming daffodils are properly planted in the fall, now is the best time to check out which ones you want for your home landscape. Visit local botanical gardens and attend spring garden tours to view the different types available and learn which varieties do well in your part of the world. After you decide on the best bulbs for you, follow these tips from the American Daffodil Society (www.daffodilusa.org):

- Order early. Early orders generally get the pick of the crop and exactly what was ordered with no surprises.
- Read the fine print, and check the guarantee. Terms vary widely. Will the company replace or refund in case of problems? Are the bulbs guaranteed true to name?
- Compare prices. You *do* get what you pay for. Cheap bulbs are generally cheap for a reason. Small bulbs generally give smaller and fewer flowers than large bulbs. If it seems too good to be true, it probably is.
- Be aware. Some bulb merchants routinely change bulb names and may substitute varieties without your knowledge. Ask other gardeners about their experiences with specific suppliers.

For daffodil sources, see the Buyers' Guide on page 101.