MINIATURE DAFFODILS

Introduction

The Royal Horticultural Society, the international authority on daffodils, separates daffodils into 13 divisions, all but one according to their shape. Divisions 1, 2, 3, 4, and 11 are large flowers, usually with one flower to a stem. Divisions 5 through 10 exhibit characteristics of a particular species from which they are descended and are usually smaller flowers, some multi-headed. Division 12 is a miscellaneous category for flowers that don’t fit elsewhere, and Division 13 is for the many species or wild daffodils. This division varies greatly in size and form.

The American Daffodil Society recognizes three sizes of daffodils—Standard, Intermediate, and Miniature. There are thousands of standard and intermediate daffodils, but very few miniatures. There are several reasons for this. Daffodil breeding began in the British Isles in the late 19th century, and the goal for most British breeders was larger flowers. The scarcity of material for breeding and the fact that the older first generation miniature hybrids were sterile discouraged many people from working in this field.

1. However, one Englishman, Alec Gray, devoted most of his attention to breeding small flowers, and it is to him we owe many of the lovely miniatures grown today. Here, he is seen outside his house in Cornwall.

2. Interest in breeding daffodils of any kind did not gain momentum in the U.S. until after World War II when one person, Roberta C. Watrous, began her long love affair with miniatures. She made her first crosses in 1946 and her last registrations in 1989. (Unlike most other flowers, daffodil breeding is a long and arduous process. It can be up to 7 years to see a first bloom and is often 15-20 years before a new daffodil is available to gardeners.) She was quite critical of her own seedlings and named very few flowers.

Today, things are different. Many people in the daffodil world are interested in creating new miniature daffodils, so we will see much more variety in color and form in the future. Now, the colors of existing miniatures are mostly limited to all yellow, white and yellow, or all white, with few exceptions.

3. Miniature daffodils are easy to grow if sited where there is light soil and very good drainage. They like at least half a day of sun and appreciate some shade in the hottest part of summer. The ideal setting for miniatures is in a rock garden or other bed where the plants are fairly small scale. They do best on slopes or in raised beds.

4. In the wild, many grow in rock crevices in the mountains, often in pure gravel, and live there happily for years. If a miniature planting seems happy, leave it alone, unless it stops blooming – then it probably is too crowded and needs dividing. Bulbs can be replanted at once or kept until fall.

The slides in this program are arranged by their divisions. First is Division 1, Trumpet Daffodils. The most commonly available yellow trumpets are:

5. ‘Bagatelle’
6. ‘Little Gem’

Miniature Daffodils slide program
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7. ‘Wee Bee’
8. ‘Tanagra’ All look very similar. It is possible that they were originally distinct but that current commercial stocks of these have become mixed.

9. ‘Small Talk’ differs from the previous ones by having much narrower petals. It also blooms later than the others and is a deeper gold.

10. ‘Gambas’ and

11. ‘Roundita’ are both distinctive, ‘Gambas’ for its unusually large, flaring trumpet and ‘Roundita,’ a new American hybrid, for its wide overlapping petals and darker yellow trumpet. It is one of the best yellow trumpets, though not yet available in any quantity. The yellow trumpets are among the easiest to grow and make nice clumps in the garden.

12. ‘Gipsy Queen,’ a reverse bicolor, opens all yellow, and the trumpet fades to white with a rim of yellow at the edge. It has starry petals with a white halo at the base.

13. ‘Lilliput’ and

14. ‘Little Beauty’ mostly look the same today. Whichever one it is, is easy to grow.
   Two that are rarely seen are more distinctive and bloom later than the two above:

15. ‘Rupert’ with its more formal look and

16. ‘Tosca’ which has starry petals with rounded tips and has a longer trumpet than most other bicolors. Both have excellent color contrast.

17. ‘Alec Gray’ has the longest trumpet in relation to its petals and is slightly flared.

18. ‘Alec Gray’ and ‘Camborne’. ‘Camborne’ has wide overlapping petals and a rolled trumpet.

19. ‘Candlepower’ has a little frill at the end of its trumpet. It and ‘Camborne’ are the first to bloom.

20. Here is a comparison of four white trumpets, from left to right: ‘Pledge’, the largest of the whites, ‘Alec Gray’, ‘Sprite’, and ‘Candlepower’.

21. ‘Elka’ is very different, with pointed starry petals and is a more creamy white. It blooms later than the other whites.
   (Note: the all-whites open white/yellow then the trumpet fades to white when mature. They don’t increase as quickly as the yellows, but most are good growers.)

There are very few Division 2 or Large-Cupped miniature daffodils. Two that can be found are:

22. and 23. ‘Picoblanco’ a lovely all white. Slide 23 demonstrates the shorter cup that is characteristic of Division 2, distinguishing it from the trumpet daffodils, and

24. ‘Sewanee’, 2W-Y, one of Roberta Watrous’ flowers, is a taller Division 2 and makes a nice clump.
Division 3 or Small-Cupped Daffodils are generally taller plants and quickly establish good clumps. Two of them resemble each other and also the ‘Sewanee’ of the previous slide. Here are all three together:

25. ‘Segovia’, ‘Yellow Xit’, and ‘Sewanee’ closely resemble each other, but you can see the longer cup on ‘Sewanee’ in this photo and the shorter cups of the other two.

26. ‘Segovia’ has much whiter petals than

27. ‘Yellow Xit’ whose petals have a slight greenish cast. These two are readily available.

28. ‘Paula Cottell’ is one of the last miniatures to bloom. It is tall and opens with a yellow cup which soon fades to white with a prominent green eye.

29. ‘Exit’ (left) and ‘Xit’ (right) represent the white Division 3’s and slightly resemble each other. ‘Exit’ has a shallow bowl shaped cup and a greenish cast to the entire flower. ‘Xit’ is pure white and has a flat, slightly fluted cup.

30. ‘Xit’ is one of the most beautiful miniatures and is a tall flower which makes nice clumps. It is generally available.

31. ‘Three of Diamonds’ is a rare Division 3 miniature – the only one at present with a red rim. It is a tall, late flower with very round petals.

There are very few Division 4 or Double Daffodils. Most doubles grow too large to fit in the miniature category. The three that are on the Approved list are:

32. ‘Eystettensis’,

33. ‘Flore Pleno’, which usually has 2 to 3 florets, as shown here, and

34. ‘Wren’. They are shy bloomers and slow to increase.

Division 5, the N. triandrus group hybrids, are all descended from the wild triandrus daffodils and show the swept back petals and drooping pose of the species. They can have up to 10 florets on a stem, though most have 2 to 4 florets. Many of the triandrus are challenging to grow; they need a very gritty soil. Most are hard to find, but here are a few that are available.

35. ‘Angel’s Whisper’, ‘Angel o’Music’, and ‘Angel’s Breath’ are sisters bred in Tasmania and are now growing in the U.S. in good numbers. Very similar to each other, ‘Angel’s Whisper’ seems to be the best grower.

Two of the oldest and most widely grown Division 5 miniatures are ‘April Tears’ and ‘Hawera’. ‘April Tears’ is deeper yellow, often with a slightly paler cup, and has much better form than ‘Hawera’. It rarely has more than 4 florets to a stem and is a slow but steady increaser. ‘Hawera’, which is widely available from Dutch importers, is a uniform pale yellow with up to 10 florets with wavy, informal petals. It increases very well but can be subject to sudden death. However, it is so cheap it can be replaced easily. **NOTE:** Nearly all the bulbs from Holland sold as ‘April Tears’ are really ‘Hawera’. ‘Hawera’ multiplies very well, and the Dutch never have enough ‘April Tears’, so they also sell ‘Hawera’ under the name ‘April Tears’. To obtain the real ‘April Tears’, buy from an American source that grows its own bulbs.
36. ‘Hawera’ and ‘April Tears’ together

37. ‘Fairy Chimes’ is another good triandrus flower. It is a little smaller than the two previous ones, and its petals fly back at a more acute angle. It usually has 2 to 3 florets.

38. ‘Mary Plumstead’ is a vigorous grower and resembles ‘Hawera’ in color but has much better form. When well grown, it can produce many florets to a stem.

39. A newer cultivar, ‘Woodstar’, is the only reverse bicolor (opens all yellow and the cup turns white) currently on the Miniature List, except for the trumpet ‘Gipsy Queen’. It blooms at the very end of the season and is spectacular but hard to find.

40. An interesting flower from Australia, ‘Laura’, is very changeable. Here are two flowers from the same plant – as it opens all yellow, then fades to white/yellow. Finally it becomes all white. It can come with only one, but usually has two florets to a stem.

There are very few white triandrus, and most are very scarce.

41. ‘Little Lass’ blooms on a short stem and has a larger cup than most triandrus hybrids. It is sometimes found in catalogues.

42. ‘Icicle’ and

43. ‘Raindrop’ have 2 to 5 tiny, perfect, pure white flowers on each stem. ‘Icicle’ has a more spreading perianth, and ‘Raindrop’ reflexes more acutely. With newly developed methods of increasing bulbs, we hope these may again be available to gardeners.

**Division 6** cultivars, the descendents of *N. cyclamineus*, have only one very reflexed flower to a stem and often look down. *N. cyclamineus* is only one species and is all yellow, so most of its children are yellow too. These are also challenging to grow and require a cooler spot that does not dry out completely in summer. This group, along with the trumpets, is the very first of the miniatures to bloom, and the flowers are very long-lasting. Some of the better ones are:

44. ‘Heidi’, which looks like a smaller edition of the species. Scarce.

45. ‘Hummingbird’, one of the best and a strong grower. It has wider petals than most and a slightly darker trumpet. Available from American growers.

46. ‘Kibitzer’ and ‘Mite’ are among the larger Division 6 miniatures. ‘Mite’ is a little larger and a bit paler in color. Otherwise there is no difference. Both are easy to grow and are fairly common.

47. ‘First Kiss’ is one of the newer cyclamineus.

48. ‘Little Star’ is one of the smallest of this group and has a nice white halo at the base of its trumpet. It is very long lasting.

49. ‘Spider’ is the earliest of the cyclamineus to bloom.

50. ‘Mitzy’ and ‘Snipe’ represent the few white cyclamineus. ‘Mitzy’ is larger with wider, blunt petals and a much longer trumpet.

51. ‘Snipe’ is starrier with pointed petals. Both open with yellow trumpets which fade to white, but ‘Snipe’s delicately fluted trumpet passes through a lovely stage of pinkish cream before going white. It is the more readily available of the two.
**Division 7, Jonquil hybrids**, encompasses the hybrids of the many species jonquils and has more color combinations, though most are all yellow. These usually have 2 to 5 florets, though a few always have just one. They are generally late flowering, fragrant, and as a group are easy to grow.

52. Here is *Narcissus jonquilla* with some of its look-alike offspring. Top left to right: *N. jonquilla*, ‘Baby Moon’, and ‘Baby Star’. Bottom left to right: ‘Chit Chat’ and ‘Pixie’s Sister’. Note ‘Chit Chat’s wider cups. All can be easily found and are generally good growers.

A group of older Alec Gray flowers are classified all yellow, but the petals rapidly go white in the sun. They look very much alike with flat cups and very round petals.

53. ‘Sun Disc’, one of the “faders” and nearly identical to ‘Bebop’ and ‘Little Sentry’ (not shown). They are all tall, late flowers that open yellow and fade to white. They have very round petals and flat cups.

54. ‘Clare’ This one reflexes sharply, especially the back petals.

55. ‘Sundial’ blooms earlier, holds its color better, and has a bowl shaped cup. All these are readily available.

Three very good newer yellow jonquils are:

56. ‘Pequenita’, the best of this lot, with perfect form. It always has one flower to a stem.

57. ‘Moncorvo’ and its sister,

58. ‘Sabrosa’. These generally have 2 to 4 florets. ‘Moncorvo’ is slightly darker and has a wider cup. Stocks of these are being increased in Holland so will be readily available soon.

Color in miniatures is found mostly in the jonquils. The orange colors in the cups of these need to be shaded or picked very early to prevent fading.

59. ‘Stafford’, an older Gray flower, is reliable and generally available.

Four flowers bred by Roberta Watrous show more color in the cups than most. Three of the four are not easy to find but are worth the effort.

60. ‘Little Rusky’, her smallest and earliest. It is widely available.

61. ‘Chappie’ was her nickname in college.

62. ‘Loyce’ was named for a good friend and editor of The Daffodil Journal.

63. ‘Odile’ is named for her great niece. The cup is generally darker than shown here.

The few white jonquil hybrids are interesting and different.

64. ‘Demure’ blooms at the very end of the season and has an almost apricot tint to its yellow cup.

65. ‘Flomay’ is the only miniature with true pink in the cup, but it must be cut young to capture it. It was named for Mr. Gray’s wife.

66. ‘Rikki’ is kin to all those confusing yellow flowers that fade white, but it opens white, so can easily be distinguished from the rest.
**Division 8** is for hybrids of the tender *Narcissus tazetta* group, familiar to everyone as the Papewhite forcing daffodils. There are very few miniatures now, but more are in the works. Here are three older ones which are reasonably hardy but best planted in a protected spot.

67. Left: ‘Canaliculatus’, very tiny and very fragrant. It increases like crazy but often doesn’t bloom the next year. It is best to treat it as an annual and buy new bulbs every year. It is widely available at reasonable prices. Center: ‘Pango’ is one of the largest miniatures and certainly the tallest. Right: ‘Minnow’ is readily available. The Dutch also sell a yellow-petalled form called ‘Pacific Coast’.

Two newer Division 8s from John Blanchard in England are:

68. ‘Crevette’ 1 to 3 beautiful florets with delicate apricot-orange cups, and

69. ‘Shillingstone’, a lovely all white with 2 to 3 florets.

There is only one miniature **Division 9** (poeticus) on the Approved List and as yet, no Division 11 (split corona).

70. ‘Haiku’ is shown here with a standard poet for reference.

The hybrids of the *Narcissus bulbocodium* group are in **Division 10**. Most of these are semi-tender and need a cold frame or greenhouse to do well. Most also bloom in winter, as they flower in fall and winter in their native habitat. Some that seem a little hardier and are spring blooming are:

71. ‘Fresh Season’

72. ‘Mitimoto’ a rare bicolor

73. ‘Kholmes’, ‘Smarple’, and ‘Spoirot’, a trio of Down Under “detective” daffodils

74. *Narcissus bulbocodium conspicuus*, though a species (Division 13), it survives in the open except in the colder parts of the country and blooms consistently, so it is shown here with the hybrids.

**Division 12** is a miscellaneous category the RHS uses to put any flower that doesn’t fit elsewhere. The three most famous miniatures, ‘Jumblie’, ‘Quince’, and ‘Tête-a-Tête’ belong here, being hybrids of a tazetta and *N. cyclamineus*, and have some characteristics of both. They need some cold protection but generally do well except in the North. More bulbs of ‘Tête-a-Tête’ are sold every year than any other daffodil. The stock is often mixed up by sellers, but they are easy to tell apart.

75. ‘Jumblie’ on the left has very pronounced fly-back petals and a longer, narrow orange cup. ‘Quince’ in the center is a lighter but very intense yellow with a wider, deep yellow cup. It usually has just a slight reflex. ‘Tête-a-Tête’ has a smooth, flat perianth with a darker cup. It usually has 2 to 4 florets, but the bulb often puts up a single floret as a secondary bloom. Old blooms can reflex. little. ‘Jumblie’ and ‘Tête-a-Tête’ are readily available.

Other Division 12 flowers look much like the cyclamineus hybrids, except that they normally are multiheaded (a no-no for Division 6). There are some very good flowers in this group, including:
76. ‘Flyaway’ is a very graceful Roberta Watrous flower, usually with 2 to 4 florets.
77. ‘Junior Miss’ occasionally comes as a single but usually has 2 to 3 florets.
78. ‘Little Becky’ is New Zealand bred with lovely scalloped cups.

Division 13 is for the species or wild forms. Many of these are very difficult to grow as they need specific environmental conditions. A few do well in home gardens. In addition to the two shown previously (N. jonquilla and N. bulbocodium conspicuus), these two also grow well in the garden:

79. N. rupicola This is a very variable species in form and cup shape.
80. N. x tenuior It is quite easy and grows well nearly everywhere.

81. If you would like to know more about the miniatures or other daffodils, we invite you to catch “yellow fever” and join the American Daffodil Society.