

Youth and Daffodils

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For the mother of a kindergartner, a little marigold growing in a Dixie cup is *de rigueur* as a Mother's Day present. Two years later, second graders germinate beans on a paper towel in a Ziploc bag. Usually that's the end of first-person, hands-on gardening activities for our youth, but parents would be well advised to offer their young children the opportunity of planting daffodil bulbs in the fall as the next step in their botany education.

Daffodils are positively unique among the spring flowering bulbs. Unlike crocuses, they make a great cut flower, and unlike Tulips, they reliably return every spring. Daffodils are hardy, growing both in the coldest and warmest regions of the continental US, and standing up to freezes, snow and rain better than any other flowering bulb, plus they have the added advantage of heralding spring year after year. They are cheap and readily available in any garden center, grocery or hardware store, offering colors ranging from pastel white, pinks and lemons to bright, bold yellows, golds, oranges and reds.

Daffodils do not require any special equipment or staking, save a stout shovel for the holes which only need to be dug once. Their increase can be measured (as Tulips usually don't increase) and they bloom earlier, too. Daffodils are not relished by foraging squirrels and deer, and indeed are bitter tasting and usually left well-alone by any of the varmints normally associated with digging and eating delicacies such as crocuses and tulips. Daffodils also have the added advantage of being educational - they have a flower part that Tulips and most flowering plants do not possess: a *corona*. The corona, which is Latin for "crown", appears on most every middle school biology test in America as part of a labeling diagram of a flower.

The daffodil bulb itself is similar to other spring flowering bulbs — once one learns how to plant a daffodil, learn which end goes up and which end goes down, for example, that knowledge applies to all bulbs, and is something a child may never learn in school.



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