how to plant narcissi bulbs

PLANTING SITE

Narcissi are very tolerant bulbs. They’ll grow well on a light, sandy soil in full sun, and they also grow happily with me on heavy clay if I add lots of grit to their planting position, and will tolerate partial shade.

INSTRUCTIONS

Plant them pointy end up, anytime from August to November, 10-15cm (4-6in) deep with 7-10cm (3-4in) between each bulb. Dead-head them once they have flowered, to help next year’s flowering. Do not remove the foliage; leave it for at least six weeks after flowering – or longer – and this will also help next year’s flowers. Mowing daffodil foliage off too early when they’re planted in grass is the most common cause of blind, non flowering bulbs.

There is an exception to the dead-heading rule with varieties such as N. pseudonarcissus and other species which will self-sow. With these, leave the seed heads on until they have opened and dispersed their seed (late May-June). You can also divide overcrowded groups in late summer and plant offsets in other parts of the garden.

For more information, read about:
- how to plant bulbs to naturalise in grass
- two-tier planting with dahlias.

IN POTS

Fill your containers with peat-free compost and plant bulbs 10-15cm (4-6in) deep with 5cm (2in) between bulbs to give you a spectacular show for inside or out.

AFTER CARE

All bulbs do best if you minimize the number of leaves you cut when you pick the flowers. It’s also important to leave the browning foliage on your bulbs until every leaf has died right down. Don’t be tempted to clear them up until every leaf is completely brown. After flowering is the time when bulbs photosynthesise and create food, stored in the bulb to help next year’s flower. If you remove the leaves halfway through this process, you’re less likely to have a flower the following year.

On poor soil, it’s worth giving almost all spring-flowering bulbs a potash feed in the early spring. This helps with root and bulb formation and will encourage them to stick around and flower on and on for years. We use comfrey pellets, rich in natural potash.

I don’t lift any of the bulbs in my garden. Planted deeply and mulched with a generous blanket of mushroom compost, I leave them in the ground to overwinter.

FORCED NARCISSI FOR INDOORS

Paperwhites are the easiest and quickest bulbs to flower inside. They look and smell wonderful, and also make a brilliant Christmas display. ‘Avalanche’ and ‘Cragford’ are also superb, but take longer to bloom.
Use a loam-based compost, lightened with some grit for planting. Narcissi are large bulbs with an extensive root structure, so large, deep pots are ideal. Plant the bulbs just below the soil surface. They will need a spell in the cold to ensure they flower well, with a temperature below 10°C, but they do not require a period in the dark. Narcissi Paperwhites and ‘Avalanche’ need only 4-6 weeks from planting to flowering, and ‘Cragford’ 8-10. Keep the compost moist but not dripping wet through this whole time. Use a decorative nest of twigs to support as they grow to keep them from flopping.