

Last week, I walked out to my mailbox to pick up my mail and out of habit, was looking at my landscape. During the winter, I look for broken branches, any abnormalities in the stems, making sure that the mulch is still covering what it should be covering. Winter is also a really great time to admire the natural structure of plants and trees, because there aren't any leaves blocking the view. Walking back to my front door, I actually spotted something green! And growing! It's a little early yet, but they're about three inches tall. The daffodils are on their way!

Daffodils have long been one of my favorite flowers. I'm not sure if it's because they're one of the first things to bloom in the spring, there's so many different varieties, but there's so many reasons to love them, it's hard to tell which one it is. One of the main reasons, especially here in Nebraska, is that daffodils are relatively cold hardy. During spring in Nebraska, where it can go from below freezing to seventy degrees and back again within a week or less, that is a very important quality to have in an early flowering plant. Without this quality, a badly timed snow or frost could wipe out all of the daffodils for that year.

There are twelve different groups of daffodils based on the form of the flower. The groups differentiate depending on the size of the bell, the part that sticks straight out, the size of the petals, the number of petals, and how they all relate to each other. For example, a division three daffodil has a bell that is less than one third the length of the petals. They come in colors ranging from almost pure white to yellow to pink, with many combinations of these colors on the petals and the bell of the flower. There are also what are called "doubles" that have double the number of petals as a normal daffodil.

Daffodils are commonly planted as bulbs, because they bloom sooner than with seed. Bulbs are underground condensed modified stems that are waiting for the right conditions to send the stem above the ground. Bulbs are easier to plant and harder to kill than seedlings, as long as there is proper drainage where you plant them. Bulbs are susceptible to rots when they are in soils that stay damp and don't drain. When planting bulbs, the "nose", or the pointy part of the bulb, should face up. This is the part that will send up what will become the leaves and stem of the daffodil. There should be instructions that come with your daffodils that instruct on how to care for them, but six inches deep is a good rule of thumb. Daffodils should be planted about six inches apart. If you notice your daffodils getting crowded after a few years, dig them up after the leaves have died back and respace them. It's too late to plant them and get flowers this year, but planting them in early fall should give you flowers the next spring.

I am shocked and thrilled that the daffodils are already starting to poke their heads out this year. I know it will be a few weeks before they actually flower, but it's nice to see that they're considering it. Thankfully they're relatively cold hardy, so we don't have to worry much about minor frosts. There are twelve different classes of daffodil to choose from, and they come in a vast assortment of color combinations. Daffodils are grown as bulbs, and should be planted nose up in the soil about six inches deep and six inches apart. If you have any questions or would like to suggest a topic for me to write about, feel free to contact me at the Buffalo County Extension Office, at 308-236-1235, or mearnest2@unl.edu