

## *A Note to Spring Signed Autumn*

By Kim Smith

The narrow bud opens her beauties to  
The sun, and love runs in her thrilling veins;  
Blossoms hang round the brows of Morning, and  
Flourish down the bright cheek of modest Eve,  
Till clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing,  
And feather'd clouds strew flowers round her head.  
The spirits of the air live in the smells  
Of fruit; and Joy, with pinions light, roves round  
The gardens, or sits singing in the trees.

— from *To Autumn* by William Blake (1757-1827)

Autumn, with its cool weather and frequent rainfall, is the season to plant in anticipation of spring, whether planting trees and shrubs as part of the overall framework, organizing the borders, or planting the surrounding space to complement the flowering trees. Free and available for the taking is nature's beneficial mulch of newly fallen leaves. Amidst the flowering trees and shrubs and beds of perennials, the bulbs we sow in autumn illuminate the spring. What began as a short note on fragrant spring flowering bulbs, quickly took the form of a long letter addressed to the well-known and well-loved bulbs with scented flowers, as well as lesser-known fragrant species that deserve to be planted more abundantly.

### *Narcissus*

The bee doth love the sweetest flower,  
So doth the blossom the April shower.

Thinking of spring in autumn, I am reminded of the first time I smelled a fragrant jonquil. The diminutive, cupped-golden flowers were growing freely in an abandoned garden. I have no idea what variety of jonquil it was and can hardly give a good description, remembering more its scent than any distinguishing great beauty. This plain little jonquil was half the size of the more commonly grown big, brassy King Alfred trumpet types, and it (the dainty one) had a dreamy honeysuckle fragrance! I have to laugh recounting a comment one of our children made after taking note of a border planted with soldier-like trumpet daffodils, forming neat perfect rows, face forward and at sentinel-like attention, growing in ground covered with bark mulch in that most peculiar shade of orange-red. She exclaimed, "Look, Mom, Lego daffodils!" I am sure everyone familiar with the plastic toy understands the allusion. Several of the sets come with miniature plastic flowers. Unlike their modern counterparts, the sweet and friendly species narcissus and early hybrids exude a lightness and grace of form, along with a delicious fragrance. Here is one species not improved by an ever more brazen variety of size and form.

Narcissus is named for the handsome youth in Greek mythology with whom Echo fell in love. Narcissus became so enamored of his own reflection in a pool, sitting and smiling at himself, that, on hearing Echo's repeated proclamations of love, he forgot to eat and drink until withering away and dying. Where he had been sitting, the lovely Narcissus flower sprang to life. Echo stood beside the flower, pining and grieving, until she too withered away. Nothing was left of Echo but her voice, senselessly repeating the words of others.

The following is a short list of favorite narcissus and jonquils, selected not only because they are fabulously fragrant, but also because these cultivars return reliably year after year. The list is arranged to create a cheery procession of scented blooms. By planting with non-scented narcissus that are either earlier blooming or later blooming, the daffodil season is extended for several months.

Narcissus x odorus 'Campernelle' ~ Yellow perianth and corona, superb naturalizer, 10-12 inches, zone 4 to 9, early season.

Narcissus tazetta 'Martinette' ~ Golden petals and a vivid orange cup. Floriferous, blooming for several weeks, 14 inches, zone 4 to 9, early to mid-season.

N. jonquilla 'Sweetness' ~ Golden-yellow blossoms, 16-18 inches, zone 3 to 8, mid-season.

Narcissus tazetta 'Geranium' ~ Ivory white petals and a cheery vivid red-orange cup, floriferous, 16-18 inches, zone 4 to 9, mid-season.

N. 'Minnow' ~ Creamy white petals with a clear yellow cup. Many blooms on each 10 inches stem, zone 5 to 8, mid-season. 'Minnow,' along with 'Geranium,' are my current favorites for fragrance and their extended season of blooms.

N. 'Fragrant Breeze' ~ Apricot-orange, long cup daffodil juxtaposed against white petals, 14 inches, zone 3 to 8, mid-season.

N. poeticus 'Ornatus' ~ Pure white petals, the cup is similar to that of 'Actaea,' blooming two weeks earlier, 16 inches, mid-season.

N. 'Laurens Koster' ~ Creamy white perianth with deep cadmium yellow corona. Multiple flowers on many stems, 16-18 inches, zone 6 to 9, late-season.

N. poeticus 'Actaea' ~ Snowy white perianth with a picotee edging of red around the small yellow cup, 16 inches, zone 3 to 8, mid- to late season.

N. 'Fragrant Rose' ~ White overlapping petals combined with a long-cup shaped corona of rosy pink, 16 inches, zone 3 to 8, mid- to late season.

N. jonquilla ~ The species jonquil with two to three sunny yellow flowers on each stem, 5 inches, zone 5 to 9, late season.

N. 'Sinopel' ~ Sparkling, fresh white petals with short, light, bright green cup trimmed with yellow, 16 inches, zone 3 to 8, late season.

N. jonquilla 'Baby Moon' ~ Diminutive lemon-yellow jonquil with three to four blossoms on each stem, 8 inches, zone 3 to 8, late season.

N. jonquilla 'Bell Song' ~ Cups of rose pink surrounded by ivory white perianth, 12 inches, zone 3 to 8, late season.

N. 'Sir Winston Churchill' ~ Plump double daffodil, with pale orange petals swirled throughout the creamy white petals, 16 inches, late season.

Excerpt from *Oh Garden of Fresh Possibilities! Notes from a Gloucester Garden*, David R. Godine, Publisher. January 2009.



*Fragrant Narcissus 'Bell Song' and 'Minnow'*