

SPRING BULBS

A couple of weeks ago a Palmerston North gardener sent me a letter with a photograph of a yellow trumpet daffodil that had two flowers on the same stem. It had flowered in the spring of 2009.

The gardener had found this unusual and was asking me why it had occurred.

There are freaks in nature but after consulting with a local bulb growing nursery it was suggested that the variety was most likely one called Golden Perfection and this daffodil often flowered with two or more flowers on the same stem.

Other varieties may do similar on the odd occasion but likely only once in a blue moon. By the way this month is a blue moon month having two full moons during the same calendar month.

March is also the month when most if not the full range of spring bulbs come available in garden centres.

It is the time to pick out what new spring bulbs you wish to plant but it is not necessary the time to plant some types into open ground yet as the soil temperatures during the day are too high and certain bulbs may cook. (Tulips for instance)

The following information is supplied by NZ Bulbs and they are available through most garden centres. Plus at (www.nzbulbs.co.nz)

What Bulbs are the best for dry areas?

The following bulbs are ideal for dry areas such as under hedges and along the north wall of the house. As long as they receive enough moisture in winter and early spring for growth to commence, they will flower well year after year.

Alliums: Members of the onion family, most alliums prefer a warm sunny position with good drainage. The most common varieties sold in New Zealand are Moly, a cluster flowered medium yellow on 30 cm stems; and Sphaerocephalon, a deep purple/mauve ball on 60 cm stems. The flowers of Sphaerocephalon are great for dried arrangements.

Babiana: Short growing, babiana are available in mixed blue and purple shades.

Although very small bulbs, they need to be planted relatively deep, 12 cm or more, an adaptation to prevent baboons digging them up to eat in their native Africa. Their name is derived from their common name 'Baboon flowers'.

Brodiaea : Early summer flowering, brodiaea are a great touch of colour when most bulbs have finished flowering. Queen Fabiola is the most common variety sold, it is a strong growing strain of a light violet purple colour. Brodiaea need a good dry spell in summer to flower successfully the following year.

Ixia: Spectacular in mid to late spring with bright yellow, gold, pink and red shades on tall 40 60 cm stems. Normally available as mixed colours and occasionally as individual colours, the most common being ixia viridiflora, a stunning blue-green.

Sparaxis: Superb for naturalising as they increase rapidly by bulb division as well as by self-seeding. Available in mixed shades of white, pink, rose, orange and red. Growing 20 30 cm tall, the flowers resemble freesias in shape. Mid spring flowering.

Tritonia: Predominantly available as mixed colours in white, orange and pink shades, tritonia will produce masses of flowers in late spring. They have a very similar flower shape to sparaxis and freesias, although they flower much later, filling the gap between

spring and summer flowering bulbs. The flowers are carried on 20 cm stems and they last reasonably well in the vase.

What bulbs are the best for shade and damp?

The following are the best for shady areas such as the south side of the house, shady banks, or beneath trees and shrubs. A little direct sunshine each day is a bonus, but not essential. They all tolerate damp conditions, but prefer not to be continually wet.

Specialised wet loving plants are necessary for the really wet places such as near ponds and streams.

Bluebells: Naturally occurring in forested areas, bluebells are happiest in dappled shade and moist soil. They will naturalise well in these conditions, increasing through bulb division and seed production to establish large drifts. They are available in blue, pink and white shades.

Chionodoxa : Translating from the Latin as 'Glory of the snow', chionodoxa flower in early spring through the last of the melting snow in their native Europe. They need a cool shady site that gets a touch of sunshine in spring and summer. They are not suitable for warmer areas. Two main varieties are available Luciliae, a medium blue with a white centre; and Sardensis, a deep gentian blue.

Crocus : One of the earliest spring flowers; crocuses produce three or four flowers from each corm planted, giving a great display from few corms. Two main types are available species crocuses and hybrid crocuses. Both are available in white, cream and shades of blue and yellow. The species crocuses are earlier to flower and are slightly smaller.

Erythronium: Commonly known as 'Dogs tooth violets' as the corms are similar to the shape of a dog's tooth. The foliage is very attractive in its own right. Available in white (White Beauty) and yellow (Tuolumnense), it naturalises readily beneath trees and shrubs in the rich soil and shade.

Fritillaria: Amongst the most unusual bulbs available, fritillaria come in a wide variety of forms, from the 30 cm mahogany F. camschatcensis to the stunning orange 1 m tall Crown Imperial. They all like a cold, shady position, with some afternoon sun. Crown Imperials are not suitable for warmer districts. Stunning flowers though they are, fritillaria are also distinguished by having rather pungent odours.

Leucojum : A spring classic with the white bells, dotted green at the petal tips, Leucojum are commonly known as snowflakes. Often confused with snowdrops, snowflakes have large daffodil sized bulbs and will grow well in all areas of New Zealand, unlike snowdrops, which are confined to colder areas. Damp conditions and semi shade are tolerated well. Ideal for naturalising beneath deciduous trees where they can get winter sun and spring and summer shade.

Problems ring me at 0800 466464 (Palmerston North 3570606)