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Daffodils from Your Garden to the Show

~by Donna Dietsch, former Midwest Regional VP

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[Accompanying YouTube videos: [Part I](#), [Part II](#), [Part III](#)]



When picking flowers, you will want to have a container with water in it to take out to the garden. Use lukewarm water since it is more easily absorbed by the flowers. I have some small plastic wastebaskets that I got at a dollar store. They are just the right size. Also you need a pen to write the name of the flower on the stem. If you need to do it, you can also write the color code on the stem. Write it near the bottom of the stem but not so low that you may cut it off when you adjust the heights for an entry. You have to have been out in the garden for a few days before the day you want to pick for the show since you need to have an idea of what will be ready to pick. You want to pick the bloom at its peak. If you have a refrigerator or a cold

basement to store them for a few days, then you will go out each day and pick those that are ready. Have an idea about which classes you would like to enter. If you want to do a Marie Bozievich Ribbon, you need four divisions, so you will need to plan to pick some that fit in.

First, look at the flower closely to reject those that have obvious flaws, especially tears and cuts. Check the back of the flower to see if all petals are evenly spaced. Be sure that there is no green on the back and the spathe is intact. Check the stem for discolorations and reject those with a lot of twisting which is hard to correct. Look at the cup for tears and uneven edges. Some problems with

the edges can be corrected, but if you have enough flowers, just get the best ones. Look at the color. Has the reverse actually reversed? Is the cup that is color coded "R" really red all the way to the bottom? Count the petals on multiple headed flowers to be sure they all have six.

The most important part of the judging, and the one that has the most points, is condition. This refers to tears, cuts and nicks, and also the age of the flower. Too young is as bad as too old. Let the bloom develop on the plant until it is at its peak. If you have many insects in your garden, they can remove pollen from the flower, so look for pollen dropped in the cup. The judges will.

When you decide that you want to pick one, remember that virus is spread by using the same instrument to

cut all your flowers. I have two ways that I ensure that I am not spreading virus to another flower. I get a box of single edged razor blades at the hardware store. They come in a box of 100 for less than \$6. I use each blade twice, making a cut on one side then the other. Then I put the blade in alcohol. Or I have used my fingernail to make a cut in the stem and then bend the stem over to break it off. I can pick ten blooms before I wash my hands. Since I do have a fridge, I pick for several days before a show, so I

seldom pick more than ten per day. There are viruses that are not readily apparent in one cultivar, but will show up in another. I don't want to take any chances. Cut the stem as long as you can. You can shorten it later.

Immediately, when you pick the bloom, write the name on the stem and put it into the water. Many people hold the flower, bloom down to keep the sap from running out. When I have finished picking, I take the container into the house and change the water. I still use lukewarm and let them sit for about an hour. Then I change the water to cold and sit down to double check the blooms and do some grooming on them before I refrigerate them. It is easiest to do it then before they stiffen. If you leave it to

the night before the show, you may not get much sleep, and you can get sloppy. It's when you're tired that you put your

fingernail through the petal of the one that would have been Best in Show. I've done that.

When you check over your blooms, look for the same things you looked for when picking them. There will always be a flaw that you missed. Putting them in warm water and having them in the house for an hour before touching them, gives the flowers a chance to soften up and makes it easier to manipulate them. Then you put them in the refrigerator to keep cool.

“An exhibitor has to know some of the things the judges will consider in order to know which bloom to pick from his or her garden.” ~Donna Dietsch

ADS Scales of Points

Cold flowers are impossible to groom. The reason why I change the water to cold after they have been in the house for a while, is that the cold water will keep them from developing further. You did pick them at their peak of perfection.

After you have let your flowers sit inside for an hour or so, you will go through each of them. Look for faults that you overlooked outside. There will be some.

First check the petals. Turn the flower to the back and make sure all petals are at right angles to the opposite ones. Reject any that have a petal not in place. Look at the spathe and make sure it is whole and not badly torn.

Look for mitten thumbs and large tears and splits on the edges. Remove any little "things" that may be inside the spathe. They are leaf parts. These are usually on multiple flowered blooms. Use cuticle scissors because they are small and sharp.

Check the front of the flower. Look for mittens again. Look at the place where the petal is attached to the cup. Sometimes it is attached too far up on the cup which will make the inside of the cup bulge inward. You can try to correct this by inserting a Q-Tip inside the cup and holding the cup in two fingers, press the Q-Tip outward, squeezing the cup a little to the outside, and sometimes it will go back into place. Use a squeeze, press, squeeze, press to try this. Or you can put the Q-Tip inside and press the cup around it to round it up. If it doesn't

work, there is nothing you can do.

Make sure there are no tears on the rim of the cup, and that the ruffles are even or nearly even. If the ruffles are not even, you can fix this a little. Make sure your fingers are warm. Place your index finger in the cup and your thumb on the outside, right at the ruffle. Slowly work your fingers along the cup, flattening out the ruffle as you go. Very carefully!! You can tear the edge if you don't do it slowly. You may find it easier to put your thumb inside and your finger outside. I use my finger inside for jonquil and triandrus types and my thumb inside for larger flowers. I use my pinkie for minis. Yes you can groom those, too. As you grasp the edge, twist your hand slightly to the outside forming the ruffles to the outside of the cup. Check to make sure the ruffles are even around the cup. Sometimes they go further out at the bottom of the cup. You can use the same method to put them closer in.

Sometimes the cup is square or lopsided and not round as it should be. Put your finger inside the cup, all the way down or as far as you can and gently press your fingers together to re-form the cup. You use a light pressure for this and the heat from your finger is enough to press the tissue of the flower to make it go the way you want it to go. I would suggest that as soon as you find a pot of daffodils in the grocery store, you get some to try these techniques out. It's easier than waiting until you have that blue ribbon one to try to groom.

You should know by now how to press

the petals back to make them flat. I use a Q-Tip for this if I think I might tear the petals with my fingers. Otherwise, just push them back.

Here's a tricky little trick. When you have folds in the petals, or the edges are not flat, there are some things you can do. Make sure your fingers are warm, again. Carefully press the petals between your fingers. The pressure is just enough to flatten the folds, but not enough to bruise the petal. Hold the pressure for a short time and do it again if the petals are not flat. You can flatten the edges of the petals the same way, but do it very carefully. If you press too hard or too fast, you will tear the edge of the petal. You can make the petal have less of an incurve as long as you don't go all the way up to the center at the micro. This takes some practice, and that's why you should get a pot of daffs to practice on or use one of the early ones in your garden. I have had a clump of Jetfire for a long time and I used it to practice on. This technique will also work to smooth petals that are ridged or the texture is a bit bumpy. It will not eliminate these problems, but you can get a flower looking better and into the show when you need a particular one. This pressing of the petals is something that very few people do, mostly because they think it will not work or they are afraid that they will bruise the petals. If I am going to smooth a ridge, I start at the bottom of the petal and work upward. For uneven

edges, I go the same way. If your fingers are up too far on the petals you can tear the edges. You do have to practice this, but when I showed the people in Pittsburgh, they could do it right away.

When the petals curl forward too much, you can get them to go backward. This can be used for cyclamineous that don't want to recurve properly. Place your index finger and thumb across the petal, thumb in the front. With your thumb, curl the petal over your finger. Do this slowly and move upward a little at a time until you get nearly to the top. The petal will recurve backward the way it is supposed to do. This will also take a bit of the incurve out of a petal.

This smoothing with the fingers is the best technique I have found. Almost no one does it. That's what gives you an advantage over others. They can grow them as well as you do, but if they can't groom as well, your flowers will look better. I once won Best in Show with a flower that had a slightly bumpy texture. I won because the other flower had a cup that was square. The other person could have adjusted the cup, but didn't know how or didn't want to try to fix it. In judging, form has more points to it than texture. Condition is the quality that the exhibitor has the most control over in terms of judging points, so that is why you want your flowers in the best possible condition.

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