

## Mark Blooming Clumps for Later Digging

~ by Sara Kinne, Bloomington, IN



*Sara's favorite spade was a gift from friend and former IDS President, Donald Sauvain. The red tape is a piece of surveyor's tape, which is tied to the handle, to make the spade easier to find in the grassy fields where she digs.*

Marking bulbs for digging in pasture grass requires more forethought than marking clumps in a garden setting. Pete Kinne came up with a great idea to mark those clumps while in bloom for easy locating once foliage is gone and the pasture grass is at least two feet high.

My consistent identification procedure is to place an I.D. tag with daffodil name in the ground on the north side of the blooming clump along with a flagged surveyor's stake if grass height will be an issue at harvest time.

The technique is to use bright orange or red surveyor's tape and loosely encompass the blooming clump at ground level and tie the two ends together. The outline of the area to be dug is nicely defined and where to place the spade cut (slightly beyond the tape circle) is crystal clear.

The appropriate time to dig is at least six weeks after each variety has bloomed and the bulb growth is in the dormant phase. Because the yellowed foliage can fall away from the underground bulb clump and mislead the digger to the true location, it is safer to encircle the clump at ground level while in bloom with colored surveyor's tape which you can easily see after foliage starts to fade. The tape then serves as a spade shovel insertion guide. A spade with its straight blade will result in minimal accidental slicing of bulbs.

Dig into the clump about an inch or two outside of the tape. Spill the contents of the hole onto a drop cloth (a paper or plastic bag works well) and pick through the soil for bulbs. If you want to plant back, do it at this time, the day you dug it. Otherwise the bulbs need to be dried and held until the ground temperature cools to 53 degrees, i.e., September or October. This involves sun drying them for a day or two and then storing them where air circulation can continue the curing process, with an ID tag included for each different kind. Storage methods vary; I prefer net bags or nylon hosiery that can be knotted to

minimize accidental mixing but my mentor always used open greenhouse trays. The critical part is continued air circulation.

If you should dig into a clump that has already sprouted new short, straight white roots, stop, and wait until next year. Trying to cure a bulb with new fresh root growth results in rot.

If I replant the day I dig, I excavate the hole and dig deeper than I am going to plant. I rejuvenate the planting hole by adding turkey grit, bone meal, and a couple of teaspoons of green sand. This is thoroughly chopped in and then the bulb is placed on a nest of perlite or sand, guaranteeing a dry bottom always. Rule of thumb is to plant three times as deep as the bulb is tall. Shallower planting results in more rapid reproduction of the bulb while deeper planting results in slower reproduction and therefore, less frequent need for digging and dividing.

The most important things to remember about growing daffodils are Sunshine and Good Drainage. You get the best blooms if your bulbs have at least six hours of sun until six weeks after blooming when the nutrients in the leaves have ceased to nourish the bulb and set the bloom for the following year. It is for that reason that braiding or tying is not recommended while you wait for the foliage to ripen as it can interrupt the cellular pathways. Never cut or mow foliage until the sixth week after bloom because that results in sparse bloom the following year and possible death for the bulb. Good drainage means the bulb will not stay wet underground which leads to rot. Hillsides and raised beds can accomplish this goal as does "lightening" clay soil with organic matter and sand.

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