

Chapter 1

Origins

There are many classical references to the daffodil in survivals of Greek and Latin literature. The plant is native to the Mediterranean and North Africa and is a member of the amaryllis family. The classical references are not specific in identification and even Pliny does not distinguish between the species.

It must be significant that the name of the Greek god of mythology, Narcissus, has become the generic term for the plant.

The whole range of daffodils is quite hardy with the exception of the Tazettas (Sol d'Or and Paper White) which probably originate from North Africa and fail to thrive and produce flowers outdoors in the U.K. and are usually enjoyed here in bowls indoors or as cut flowers from the Scilly Isles.

Bulbs grow naturally in English woodlands and in every county our woods and clearings are enhanced in spring by drifts of blue bells and daffodils.

In the private garden the influence of Italian and French design in the layout of the great houses of the aristocracy and later the country residences of the industrial barons led to the use of formal beds, to which bulbs readily conform rather than the more casual layout of the cottage gardens and, as our estate agents still quaintly describe them, the "pleasure gardens".

This trend to the use of the bulbs in a formal setting became more rigid as larger quantities of tulips became available from Holland at the beginning of the twentieth century. Plantings became very regimented, even geometric, with blocks and rows of stiff, upright tulips making their annual splashes of colour.

Happily there is now a lively use of imagination in garden layout and one can see a blend of the formal and informal in the beds and drifts displayed in our parks and the show gardens at Springfields, Spalding

and the Keukenhof in Holland against natural and newly planted backgrounds of trees and shrubs.

Another concept which is quite old in the gardening world but well worth further exploration is that of mixed plantings. Gardeners have always known that certain plant associations improve each other by setting off contrasts of form and colour. Most of the spring flowering bulbs group well together in neighbouring clumps and the smaller muscari, scilla, crocus and anemone blanda create an effective build up to the main display but with care and experimentation interplanting of quieter colours such as myosotis, aubretia, early arabis and polyanthus and viola can enhance the garish impact of tulips. Even the stronger colours of early wallflower mingled with late tulip can be effective.

Other areas which can be brightened in the spring are deciduous parts of shrubberies and rose beds where aconites, snowdrops, crocus and even hyacinths can start the year with colour or scent. Most rockeries lend themselves to an early display of miniature daffodils and jonquils now available in such variety with the bright colours and striped foliage of species and greigii tulips to follow.

Mention must be made of the past rivalry amongst gardeners in growing tulips of variegated colours of the striped Rembrandt type. These bizarre flowers were much prized and great kudos was gained by producing the precise balance of striping and edging of colour distribution. A large part of this mutation was induced by virus and as such the variegation usually proves unstable and this particular interest has now faded away with the availability of so many types of striped, flushed and lace edged tulips.

The English tulip has a special place in the annuals of gardening and enjoyed a great following of enthusiasts with Tulip societies spread widely throughout the Midlands and North. Members cherished their special varieties and held annual shows. The form of the flower was closely defined and the exact shape of the open cup was often assisted along with the help of cardboard formers and the ideal colouring both inside and out was an intricate pattern of flaming and feathering.

The last surviving Tulip Society still holding its annual show is the Wakefield Society. The first references to the societies date back to 1710 and the Wakefield Society has been in existence since at least 1820.

The tulip is not native to the British Isles. The name first appears in English in Lyte's translation of Dodoens (1578) "The greater Tulipa (as distinguished from the wild form *Tulipa silvestris*) is brought from Greece and the countries about Constantinople".

The derivation of the name itself is open to speculation but it appears to have originated from the Persian word "dulband" meaning turban,

which in Turkish becomes "Tulband".

The flower was much prized in Turkey and appears in early Eurasian paintings and decorative art.

The introduction into Europe from Turkey is well written up from a few basic facts. Bulbs were sent to Austria in the diplomatic bag of Ogierde Busbecq, Ambassador of the Austrian Emperor Frederick I at the court of Suleiman the Magnificent, Sultan of the Turkish Empire, about the year 1572.

The new bulbs were thoroughly investigated and propagated by Carolus Clusius and it was probably from contact with him that they were first introduced into England where they soon gained popularity and eventually the cachet of royal approval when Charles I enjoyed fifty varieties of tulips in his gardens.

The arrival in Holland of the first tulips from Vienna is a story in itself. Reports have it that the first bulbs were mistaken for onions, found not to taste agreeably and were thrown out with garden rubbish to be recovered by an astute gardener, grown on and flowered.

The subsequent interest and development of tulip growing was enormous, leading to the keen rivalry of growers and traders who were willing to pay high prices for rare specimens.

This culminated in the period of Tulipomania starting in 1623 and 1624 when sober merchants began to speculate and invest all their property in bulbs which would not be delivered until the following year. The mania rose to fever pitch from 1634 to 1637 when the trade collapsed overnight and fortunes were lost.

From these exciting beginnings the Dutch tulip growers settled down to build up tulip production, breed new varieties and export to the world.

It is from the Dutch fields that our English garden varieties have come, from there that the stocks planted in the English fields originated and from there that many Dutchmen have come to England, at first to sell and soon to begin growing bulbs here.