

Poeticus Hybrids—the Last of the Daffodils

May 1, 1999

The last of the daffodils, the poeticus hybrids, are almost done blooming now. These fragrant blossoms with white petals and their small cups ringed orange or red are the ones my mother-in-law called narcissus. She said the yellow ones were daffodils. And while it's never good to argue with your mother-in-law, we know that the terms narcissus and daffodil are interchangeable. Narcissus in the Latin name for the genus, and daffodil is the common English name for all of them.

Who cares about poeticus daffodils anyway? They all look alike, don't they? Well, yes and no. For many years, Division 9 was the only one which required that hybrids show the "Characteristics of the *N. poeticus* group without admixture of any other." The other divisions required only that the characteristics be predominant. So of course, the poets have many similarities.



But there are differences. Some have very green eyes; a few have an almost entirely orange cup. 'Frank's Fancy' regularly comes with two blooms to a stem. Some have cup-shaped coronas. Others, like 'Angel Eyes' (pictured) and 'Dactyl' have disk-like coronas. Some have rounded petals, and others have narrower pointed petals. In some, the petals lay flat, and in others the petals reflex. Some have a very thin, white line just inside the red rim of the cup. It is thought these are descended from the species *N. poeticus* var. *majalis*.

There are size differences as well. The jewel-like *N. poeticus hellenicus* has perhaps the smallest bloom—about an inch and a half in diameter--of all the poets, while 'Mega' has perhaps the largest at about three inches in diameter. And while poets as a group are late-blooming, there is variation in the time of bloom. 'Praecox' (pictured), with its reflexed petals and starry outline is usually the first poeticus hybrid to bloom in my garden. This year it was in bloom by April 10. 'Angel Eyes' is in full bloom now, and *N. poeticus recurvus* is still not in bloom as I write this on April 30.



Exhibitors like 'Killearnan', and it is one of the best for showing. Many say the reason it wins is because it really isn't a poet at all, but a Division 3 flower. No one seems inclined to have the classification changed, however.

Perhaps because the blooms are very similar, breeders have not worked much in this division. Most are from the early part of the century and many were bred by the Rev. George Engleheart. 'Actaea', usually available in garden stores, dates to pre-1927. Mrs. Merton Yerger (Meg), a backyard gardener living in Maryland, has specialized in poeticus hybrids and has registered about ninety cultivars, far more than anyone else. Most are available only from her.

Add a few poeticus hybrids to your garden. They'll extend your daffodil season, and delight you with their pure white petals and delicious fragrance.