

True Grit

Anti-viral edition 4

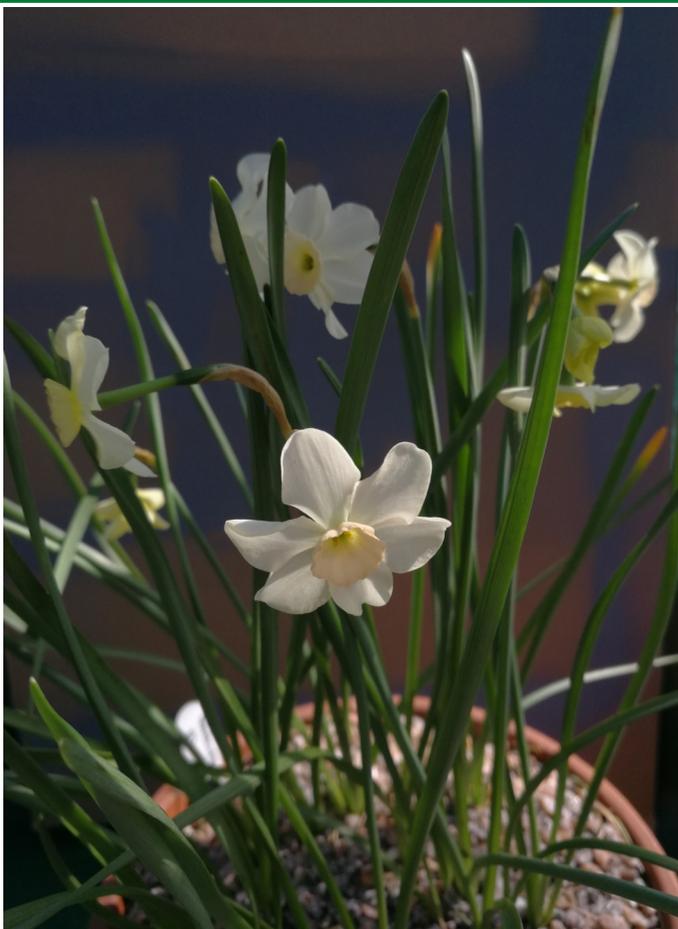
April 2020

***Spring has Sprung
better then ever***

More Narcissus

Not more daffodils did I hear you say! By popular request I reply, (well one of you asked) It has been an amazing year for most spring bulbs especially Narcissus. I think it has helped that I have gained confidence in my approach to growing them. (More on that later). I mustn't be too self congratulatory, since those in the garden have been better than usual with no help at all from me. Our impression is that it was an extremely wet Autumn but actually it wasn't in Surrey. It was a degree cooler in November but otherwise not outstandingly different from other recent years.

Read on; it isn't all daffodils!



Narcissus 'Flomay' named by Alec Gray after his wife. Derived from *Narcissus watterii* which is also the case for many of my favourite hybrids.

A love of Erythronium.

My introduction to *Erythronium* was during a visit to the late plantswoman Moira Reid at her home at Moyclare, Liskeard, Cornwall.

Moira was a friend of my grandmother and I was a regular visitor during the early 1980s; we used to exchange plants and on one occasion she gave me a packet of seed of *Erythronium revolutum*. I was very pleased with the germination and the nice patterns on the leaves during the five year wait for flowers.

My next acquisition was in 1993 when I purchased seed from the late Wayne Roderick of *Fritillaria roderickii* and *Ceanothus roderickii* fame. The most successful were *E. multiscapideum*, *E. californicum*.



Erythronium 'Minnehaha'



Erythronium 'Winifred Lorraine'



Erythronium 'Apple Blossom'

It was not until early 2000s that I met Keith and Ros Wiley, initially at the Garden House then at Wildside Garden. My work took me to Tavistock at that time so regular visits were possible. It was clear that Keith had the most fabulous selection of *Erythroniums* that I had ever seen so I took the opportunity to buy most of the selections that he had available

Since then I've been able to add a few from both RHS Wisley and AGS plant sales. Not all have been successful; *E.hendersonii* just will not survive despite several attempts. *E.americanum* sometimes flowers very well as it did last year and then this year just leaves.

I now grow rather a lot from my own seed and most years there is something sufficiently interesting to nurture my continued interest.

Melvyn Jope



Editor's addition;
Erythronium 'Harvington Snow Goose'.
So aptly named.

Paeonia clusii

Some years ago I was given seed of *Paeonia clusii* collected by John Fielding. He was photographing plants for his book *The Flowers of Crete* when he came across plants that were the usual white but also included pink forms.

One of the plants from this collection produced picotee flowers this spring; I am not confident it will do the same next year. It looks as though I may get good seed germination because I saw bees visit the flowers several times.

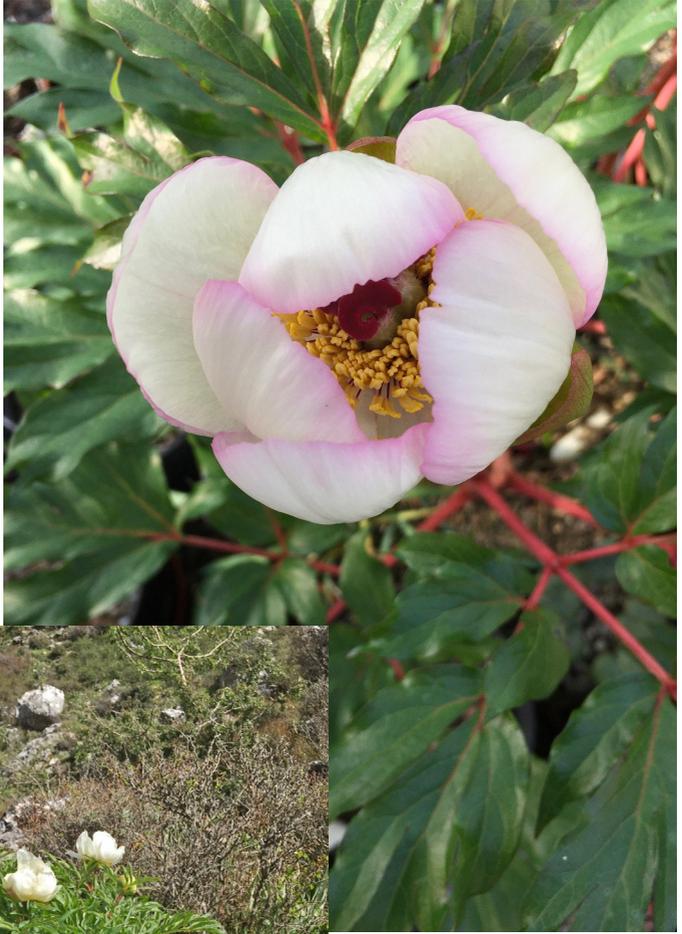
In 2018 I saw a lot of plants at Omalos in full flower. Finding seed from 2017 underneath the plants was easy so I collected a few and germination was good.

Melvyn Jope



Pollination in progress

Paeonia clusii
picotee form



Paeonia clusii flowering at
Omalos



Narcissus asturiensis was one of the first daffodils that I remember admiring at an AGS show. Ivor Betteridge from Ashby de la Zouch used to show a form he called *Narcissus asturiensis* 'Fuente De'. I grew it from several seed allocations before I had the above form with the scalloped margin to the trumpet so typical of the species.

A hybrid that includes *N. asturiensis* is ***Narcissus* 'Gipsy Queen'** which is an Alec Gray hybrid with *N. minor*. The latter seems happiest when the stems are at 45 degrees to the vertical and it has passed this characteristic on to Gipsy Queen. The colouring is unusual and varies as the flower ages.

Narcissus asturiensis 'Wavertree' is a wild collected larger form. I have two quite different examples of this but I've no idea which is correctly named.



Taking pictures on my mobile phone

I was recently given a mobile phone which incorporates a highly rated Leica camera. In many respects it is the best digital camera I have owned.

A few years ago Jon Evans was running a camera course and invited members of the two Surrey Groups to attend. We learnt a great deal but a key lesson associated with taking flower pictures was:

* Stop-down by up to 1.5 stops to prevent whites and yellows being burnt out. Images can be made brighter using Photoshop, or similar, later.

* Have single point focussing and exposure setting to ensure that the point of interest, usually the flower head, is at optimum brightness and perfectly focussed.

Both of these settings were possible on my compact camera but not simply. On the mobile phone they are quick, and easily remembered. In addition I always have the phone in my pocket, with the result that I have recently been taking all the pictures on the phone camera. Also, the screen does not get washed out by the sun as readily as that on my compact does.

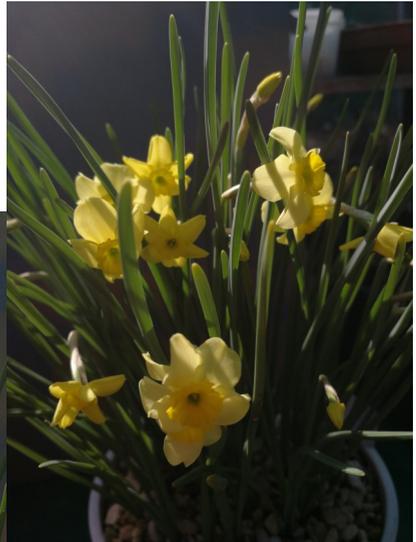
It isn't all better on the phone. It is like trying to take a photograph with a slice of bread. There is nowhere convenient to hold the damn thing and you need a spare hand to touch the exposure 'button'. The touch sensitive screen is there to trap the unwary. Next thing you know you have a 5 minute video of your shoes. I'll get the hang of it someday.



I won some bulbils of *Narcissus canariensis* in the raffle at Epsom. They were labelled, 'ex Harry Hay, coll. Hecker '76' and had been donated by Terry. At first they were slow to increase in size but this year one flowered for the first time. *Narcissus canariensis* is no longer a recognised species. It is listed as a synonym for *Narcissus tazetta* ssp *canariensis* but if you search for it there is no such subspecies. Michael Salmon regards the name as a synonym for *Narcissus papyraceus* which as a non-botanist I find easy to agree with. The flower is white, very similar to the well known 'paper white', and none of the tazettas have a white bowl. In any case I shan't change the name on the label. It will be *Narcissus canariensis* for me.

Narcissus rupicola is a charming dwarf species but I haven't found it easy to keep. It is used in a number of hybrids including ***N. 'Clare'*** by Alec Gray. It has taken a couple of years to grow a potful of flowering size bulbs and this year it put on a good show.

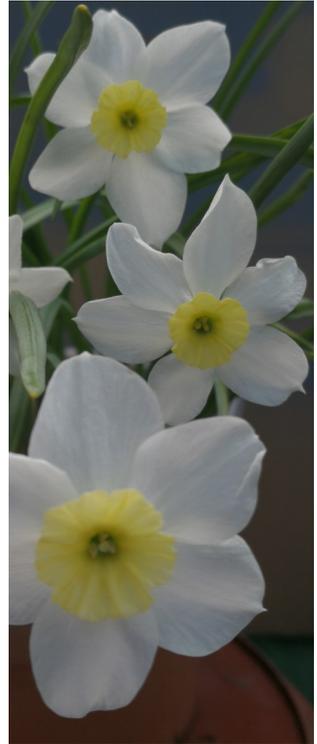
The year I bought the original bulbs I had a really bad attack of Narcissus Fly. They attacked mainly the larger trumpet daffodils but these were standing nearby. Most of the really dwarf species were elsewhere and not affected. Perhaps the fly knows there isn't enough meat in a small bulb to satisfy their grubs, or is that wishful thinking?



Narcissus Clare

I would normally rotate the pots from time to time to ensure balanced growth but there being no shows I didn't this year. I would also normally take the pots into the protection of frames or greenhouse when the buds mature to prevent a battering by the wind and rain.

Although the judges like a large pot crammed with bulbs I consider this pot to be too crowded.



Narcissus 'Segovia'

In a previous edition I mentioned that *Narcissus watieri* is my favourite daffodil. *N 'Segovia'* is another hybrid attributed to Alec Gray although it was actually registered by his wife, Flomay, as if originated by her. It is my favourite hybrid. The plant has poise and the flower form and colouring is perfect. I've had some bad years with it but this year have three pots that wouldn't have been disgraced at an AGS show.

The Grays must have liked it because I think they called their house in Cornwall by the same name.

***Narcissus watieri* or *N. rupicola watieri*?**

This species has been split and lumped regularly and I think at present is lumped i.e. *N. rupicola ssp watieri*. Michael Salmon on the other hand argues that *rupicola* and *watieri* are separate species because of the different habitats they occupy, and the distance between where they currently grow and lack of a possible high elevation land bridge between their current locations.



Narcissus triandrus pallidulus

Narcissus triandrus.

In the short time that I have been growing species Narcissi the classification of triandrus has changed several times and still depends on which authority is being asked. Some triandrus subspecies have even been split into species. Again, I find Michael Salmon's classification very plausible. There are many fine hybrids but I delight in the species which grow naturally in acid substrate at the edge of coniferous woodland. They are later flowering when there are more pollinators about so set plenty of seed.

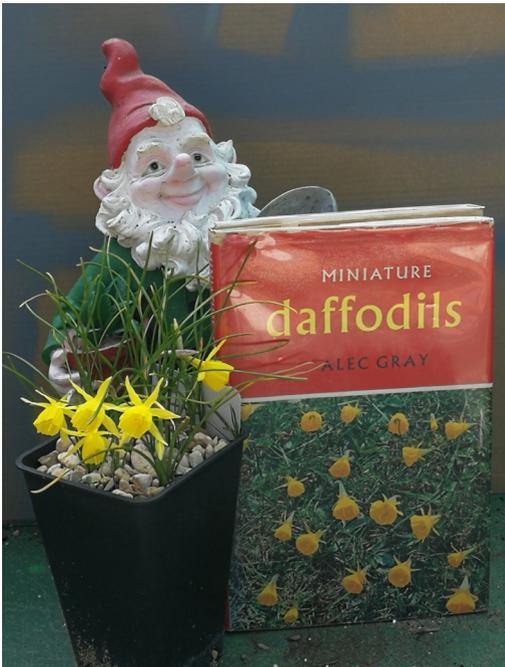


Narcissus triandrus loisleurii

Narcissus x ubriquensis

This is a natural hybrid found near Ubrique in Southern Spain. Its parents are *N. cordubensis* and *N. triandrus*, of slightly different forms for *N. x incurvicervicus*. Both hybrids have the form of *triandrus* and the colour of the jonquil.

For me it has a tendency to divide after flowering well and taking a couple of years to build up to flowering size again. It is sterile so the splitting into lots of bulbils should be welcome. Unfortunately they can be short lived. After 18 years I still have only 5 bulbs from 1.



One thing Gnorman is good at is standing still and he isn't bad at propping things up but could he do both at the same time?

The book is a modest work by Alec Gray that I bought in a second hand book shop after reading a copy from the library at Wisley.

The flower is *N. bulbocodium tenuifolius* x *N. triandrus palidulus* which I entered in a 3 pan with Solveig's Song. It didn't get past Mary Randall who declared it out of class for not being 'different' enough.



The Reds Have it

Call me conventionalist if you like but if you want a red flower grow a paeony. Daffodils should be yellow. My understanding is that the red genes in the hybrids all come from *Narcissus poeticus*.

Mine was bought as ***Narcissus poeticus ssp hellenicus*** which is described as being a dwarfier form. Michael Salmon believes the smaller size is due to the environment in which it grows since when it is grown with *N. poeticus ssp poeticus* they end up indistinguishable.

If I had a good form that I could flower well in a pot then it would challenge *watieri* as my favourite. In the garden this species is particularly susceptible to Narcissus Fly, perhaps because it is very late to flower.

Narcissus La Belle registered in 1937 as assoanus x poeticus. (Great Dane with a Chihuahua?).





Narcissus 'Bobbysoxer',
another of Alec Gray's
popular products



Narcissus 'Chappie'

Deep orange cup goes well with the petals but I don't like the twin heads. They seem to get in each other's way.



Growing Daffodils from Seed

If the seed is from a seed exchange or collector then I soak it for a couple of days on a piece of wet paper kitchen towel to rehydrate the seed. The improvement is sometimes quite considerable. For my own seed I usually sow it when it is collected. It does not become desiccated in compost. Alternatively, pass some sand through a fine sieve and store the seed with the sand in a polythene or glassine packet. Later the mixture can be passed through the same sieve to reclaim the seed, for example when it is being donated to a seed exchange. If it is being sown then there is no need to separate the seed and sand.

When the seed is 'good to go' and I have all the labels that will be needed, I fill some extra deep plastic pots with the ubiquitous free-draining-moisture-retentive compost, poke a finger in the middle to make a hole at least an inch and a half deep then put the seed in the bottom of the hole. I used to part fill the pot then place each seed evenly over the surface but for Narcissus seed germination and subsequent growth both seem to be better when the seeds are close to each other. I have not done a controlled experiment so it is only an impression. I may be biased by the fact that moist seed is not easy to sow individually. I don't use this method of a single hole for any other seed.

If it is autumn the pots are watered and put out of doors. If it is winter, as it is with most of the seed exchanges, I keep the pots indoors after watering to allow the seeds to take up moisture. After about ten days they go outside to experience the extremes of the weather and in particular to be chilled.

In order to be able to handle many pots at a time it is quite usual for growers to keep them in a tray or a crate. I use a polystyrene box with sand in the bottom and drainage holes with gauze over them.

The sand serves two roles:

1 it lowers the perched water level

2, Wetting it prevents the pot compost becoming desiccated in summer.

The polystyrene box is to prevent the black pots becoming overheated by the sun.

The boxes are a standard size used for many purposes. I get empty iced cauliflower boxes from my greengrocer and paint them with masonry paint to reduce the rate of deterioration due to sunlight.

The pots are 9cm square and 13cm deep and 12 fit snugly in the box.

The boxes are located in the open or under a cloche where they can be chilled and rained on.

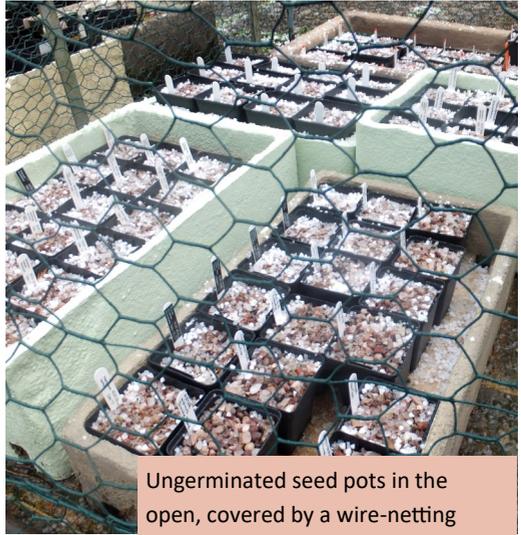
When the seedlings appear, more control is needed. The preferred location for the Narcissus seedlings is on a trolley that is easily wheeled under cover at times of excessive rain or cold. Last winter the trolleys stayed outside all winter.

I have used 'tea trolleys' that fit neatly in the central aisle of the greenhouse getting full light without shading the benches. But for the Narcissi which are mostly hardy and love the rain I have a tilting Danish Trolley. It enables all the pots to be in the rain and to receive maximum light. A slight disadvantage is that the boxes on the top shelf have to be lifted off to gain access to the pots for inspection and weeding. A box at the back to stand on would solve the problem. Incidentally, the ordinary Danish trolley is good for bedding plants and not much else, which is unfortunate because they can be found quite cheaply on eBay.

When the bulb first flowers a check can be made that it has been correctly, or at least, plausibly, named. I also mark those I consider worth growing on. Normally all of them! These I try to bulk up and I also save seed, When there are enough bulbs they go into a

round pot 13 cm diameter. 6 of these fill a box. Finally when there are enough I pot up into a 17cm bamboo biodegradable pot that has a pleasing terracotta colour that the judges like..

I bought all the remaining stock of both the 9cm square long toms and the biodegradable pots when the manufacturers ceased manufacture. The new ones have all been used now so I suppose I'll have to wash some before the big summer pot-up.



Ungerminated seed pots in the open, covered by a wire-netting lobster cage to stop the squirrels planting their acorns in the pots.

The Danish trolley needs an even paved area if it is to be moved carrying all the pots. It has quite a large footprint when fully extended. They are supplied with four shelves but I consider only three are usable since they must not overlap when the frame is extended and if the top shelf is at the top of the frame access is difficult and it can foul the doorframe





Solveig's Song

The name brought back such vivid memories to Ann and me of playing our clarinets together in the college orchestra that we just had to buy a few bulbs. Produced by R B Wallis and named after Rannweig's sister it is a *Narcissus bulbocodium tenuifolius* x *N. triandrus pallidulus*. I could have put more bulbs in the pot but for me this number is about right. It even holds the leaves out of the way so you can see the flowers.

Well done Rannweig.

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