

# The Archibald Archive – Genus Guides

## NARCISSUS

We list the most comprehensive specialist range of seeds from the wild *Narcissus* species available. This genus in Amaryllidaceae comprises about 50 species. For many years we have collaborated with John Blanchard, the world authority on *Narcissus* species both in the wild and in cultivation. John's lifelong work with this genus will long remain unrivalled. We usually list several of his wild seed collections from Spain, Portugal or Morocco as well as cultivated seed from him. A great many of the original wild collections from which our own cultivated seed has been grown, were also made by John.

Most of the main genera of bulbs listed by us have the centre of their diversity & distribution in and around Turkey but *Narcissus* is very much a western genus, spread S from Britain to NW Africa and centred on Spain. Many species from higher rainfall areas or moist, montane habitats in Spain & Portugal grow well outside in northern Europe, North America, New Zealand and Australia. Some, however, from drier areas, especially some SE Spanish and Moroccan ones, need a dry, summer rest. These are ideal alpine-house or bulb-frame plants, especially valuable as many flower during winter & very early spring.

Seed is best sown from summer to early winter. Seed sown later in winter can still sometimes germinate well. Germination is usually in winter or early spring as the weather warms. Most species only need a cool period to activate germination but a few seem to need a longer cold spell. We have had difficulty germinating some, such as *N. cyclamineus*, if our winter has been mild.

Nomenclature: This is a problem. We generally follow the nomenclature used in the monograph by John Blanchard, '*Narcissus - A Guide to Wild Daffodils*'. This can be described as an informed gardener's compromise as far as names are concerned. While John has a much greater knowledge of this genus both in the wild and in cultivation than any academic botanist, he makes no claim to botanical authority. A thorough botanical revision of the genus would appear to be badly needed but it would be very unlikely to suit both botanists & gardeners, so it is perhaps better unwritten. Many species are both extremely variable & very ill-defined. We have to deal with a diversity of taxonomic concepts. The leading current 'splitters', the Spanish botanist Fernandez Casas & his associates, whose work recalls that of Pugsley with the trumpet daffodils, have now moved on to the Moroccan populations, where previously we had only Maire's 'lump'n'split' names used in his '*Flore de l'Afrique du Nord*' and which required very long labels. Most of these descriptions of new species are wholly inadequate to define the taxon concerned and distinguish it from others. Keys just do not work when applied to wild populations. Gardeners, however, will find the sum of characteristics in most populations distinct enough. 'Splits' are shorter to write out but it is very much a question of 'take your pick' concerning the names you choose.

Further information: The monograph by John Blanchard, '*Narcissus - A Guide to Wild Daffodils*' is the best reference work on the wild species. Botanical accounts are largely unoriginal and derivative. Other horticultural books on this genus tend to be more reliable for information on the hybrids rather than the species.