

Winning Ways, Growing for Show Success - Richard Gillings

This article is fundamentally my thoughts on how I have previously approached and will approach my exhibiting of daffodils in trying to win at all levels for the past and the future. I have often been asked which cultivars to grow and the answer is not that simple.

I have always believed that of all the individual flowers exhibited at shows in Great Britain, the easiest flower to show and win a "red ticket" is the daffodil. The logic behind this thought is that essentially there are so many different classes when you break down the 13 divisions, many sub-classes of various single classes of colour, e.g. Y-Y, W-Y, Y-W, W-P, W-W as well as many other colour combinations without rim classes as well.

We then have a choice of single and multi-bloom classes. There are also classes for cultivars bred in different countries and for horticultural societies only. In the beginning there is the choice to show your flowers as novices, beginners and intermediate growers. There is local level, where in my area, I have as many as eight or nine local societies in a ten-mile radius, although I personally rarely show at any local show.

There are also group shows where basically the previous group of exhibitors and the more experienced national exhibitors will be appearing and these shows have classes for everybody. On top of these, there are also the RHS and Daffodil Society shows which, once again, are for every level of grower. We have shows from mid March until the first week of May, so timing is only really essential if you are aiming for particular shows as, otherwise, there should be plenty of choice.

Once you are ready to give exhibiting a go, I believe the best way to approach this is to first target what you believe you grow best. Is it one division? Divisions 1 to 4? Or divisions 5 to 13? Now do you grow single blooms or collections? Do you grow in pots or in the ground or a mixture of both? When most people first grow then they tend to grow everything and spread their wings everywhere, however there should come a time when you can get an idea of what you can and what you cannot grow. Do you grow for restricted classes or do you grow the so called more expensive, better chance of top flower bulbs or, like myself, a mixture?

I grow quite a few bulbs from the restricted list, yet I have never entered a restricted class. This is because I treat these cultivars chiefly as bankers, which give me consistently good flowers, year in year out. I might not necessarily show them as they could be too early or possibly too late or perhaps I am fortunate to have a superior flower from the so called more expensive bulbs which only come possibly one in every three, four or five years.

I have exhibited numerous restricted cultivars within my winning exhibits in the Bowles, Centenary Trophy, De Navarro Cup and Wootton classes and they have included 'American Dream', 'Sargeant's Caye', 'The Baltic', 'Trumpet Warrior', 'Altun Ha', 'Cadgwith', 'Cape Cornwall', 'Celestial Fire', 'Dailmanach', 'Demmo', 'Fiona McKillop', 'Gold Convention', 'Inverpolly', 'Lennymore', 'River Queen', 'Royal Marine', 'State Express', 'Strines', 'Achduart', 'Aircastle', 'Armidale', 'Badbury Rings', 'Badgeworth', 'Carole Lombard', 'Cool Crystal' and 'Doctor Hugh'.

I have also exhibited many restricted class flowers in open single classes at RHS and Daffodil Society shows with great success and, I might add, with competition that was not a walkover. I have received comments on my 'Lennymore', from Brian Duncan, saying he has never seen it grown better and similar comments on my 'Badbury Rings' and 'Dailmanach' from top growers. These three flowers are some of my favourite bankers which I have shown in my winning Bowles exhibits of 2000, 2001 and then, when I returned to growing, again in 2012 and 2013. These are just a few of

the restricted flowers with which I have had great success, along with 'Evesham', 'Jenna', 'Samsara', 'Stanway', 'Crackington', 'Crowndale', 'Dorchester', 'Gay Kybo', 'Heamoor' and 'Sherbourne'. Now we turn to those who have deep pockets and money to burn. I should be saying that the 'world is your oyster' but I do understand the business world and through buying expensive and new varieties over the years, I realise that very few, if any, new releases can outperform the tried and trusted cultivars. Like a lot of amateurs, I cannot believe that seedlings regularly make 'Best in Show' and many are never to be seen grown to these levels again. The above is my opinion and based on this, I would not want to bankrupt you by recommending cultivars in this group.

There are, of course, many cultivars that I have found to be very consistent in the £3 to £10 price range and can compete at the highest level in the top collection classes. These include 'Ombersley' (£4), 'Disquiet' (£4), 'The Baltic' (£3), 'Tuscarora' (£4), 'Castle Howard' (£5), 'Auchranie' (£4), 'Banker' (£4), 'Cameo Joy' (£7.50), 'Cape Point' (£5), 'Flor D'Luna' (£5), 'Honeybourne' (£5), 'Impeccable' (£4), 'Inverpolly' (£3), 'Pol Crocan' (£4), 'Sheelagh Rowan' (£5), 'Terminator' (£5), 'Best Friend' (£7.50) and 'Moon Shadow' (£5).

I have deliberately stayed away from explaining my pot and cultivation procedures as I believe I do nothing different to or more special than any other grower. My growing medium is a John Innes No 3 mix. I feed pure potash once 100mm to 150mm high and once more again when flowered or dead headed, although I do believe in watering well.

To finish off, I would reiterate that I target and concentrate solely on my aims as I know exactly what I am looking for.

I wish you all well for future growing and exhibiting.