

Foliage up Early? Don't Worry.
By Mary Lou Gripshover

In some parts of the United States, daffodils are already in bloom. In Ohio, where I live, spring and daffodils are still several weeks away. Well, some of the earliest ones will bloom soon, but most of them will bloom in April. So now when the weather is right, it will be time to clean up the garden.

We had mild weather through the end of 1998, with a couple of weeks of really cold weather in early January. Then it got unseasonably warm, and a lot of bulbs—including daffodils—began growth. While the general population loves it when it gets near 70 degrees in February, gardeners cringe, wondering what will happen to their plants. If you planted daffodils, the answer is, “Not much permanent damage.”

Most daffodils are really pretty cold hardy, being natives of the mountains of Spain and Portugal. There are some native to the Mediterranean area, but they and their descendants are not usually offered in bulb catalogs or garden stores. You would have to seek them out from specialist growers. Some daffodils, especially those descended from *N. jonquilla*, normally put up foliage in late autumn. While the winter temperatures may damage the top several inches of foliage, this doesn't seem to hurt the bulbs at all.

Many of my bulbs have had foliage above ground since mid-February, but that's pretty much normal for this time of year. I can see buds in between some of the foliage on some of the miniatures. If we get temperatures in the 50s, they may open in early March. But they're usually early anyway. Most daffodils are still a month away from blooming. A couple of years ago, the season was very early, with lots of daffodils in bloom in March; then we got temperatures down into the teens. As temperatures warmed, the foliage and flower stems looked like white spaghetti laying in the garden. Eventually, this white foliage turned brown and dried up, but the leaves continued to grow. (You can tidy things up in the garden by pinching off the DRIED foliage tips.) Many of the flowers were ruined for that year, but the bulbs didn't suffer. If temperatures get into the 20s when the flowers are in bloom, the stems may get bent and frozen. Sometimes the flowers will stand up again; but if the stem is severely bent, it's probably better to cut the blooms and bring them inside to enjoy. The bloom usually isn't damaged, but the stem, maybe because it's hollow, doesn't recover as well.

Blooms can withstand snow as well. Naturally a heavy snow may break some stems, but there should be no permanent damage to the bulbs. In fact, the snow acts as an insulating blanket for the bulbs, giving additional protection should the temperature fall extremely low. Morning frosts may cause blooms to bend over, but they will usually stand up again when the sun comes out.

I can only remember one season when some BULBS were damaged because of cold weather. It was a really cold winter, and temperatures went to -20 degrees fahrenheit, without snow cover. Newly planted bulbs, which hadn't had time to root properly, and some miniature bulbs didn't survive. But those were unusual temperatures.

If you do get severe weather, and damaged foliage, it's even more important to let the growing leaves on as long as possible. Don't pull the leaves off to tidy up. Remember, the leaves are making next year's flowers. You need to let the leaves grow—without tying them up in any way—for at least six weeks after normal blooming time. I know it doesn't look pretty, but you just have to do it!

So if you had some cold weather after your bulbs started growing, don't worry. Be happy you planted daffodils.