

*An Early Spring and a Late Show*  
*or*  
*Who Put All These Daffodils in My Refrigerator?*

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This is a tale of a late daffodil show, and blooms opening earlier than we Minnesotans have ever experienced before. Our story begins in the fall of 2009. It was a warm fall here in Minnesota, followed by deep snow before the ground froze solid. Nevertheless, we were feeling very smug—with all that snow, our late show (May 15–16) should be perfect. Then, like the rest of the US, spring 2010 came early and with a vengeance; day after day in the high 40s to 60s is unheard-of for March in Minnesota! As several of us left for Murphys, CA for the national convention, we were conscious that the deep snow was almost gone. Snowdrops and early crocuses were ready to bloom, and daffodil foliage tips were already evident. Oh dear—that's way too early for Minnesota, even when our show is on the front end of Mother's Day, and this year it was scheduled for the weekend after!

In early April our members brainstormed what to do. Is it possible to refrigerate blooms for as much as six weeks? Several of us had tried two to three, but **six**? Could we realistically have a show? We decided **yes**, let's find a way!

*Here is how we did it*

**Finding refrigerators**

We encouraged members to ask neighbors if they had a spare refrigerator. Our next door neighbors had one in their garage, plus we have a small one in our basement. During the last week, I ended up putting some blooms in my mother-in-law's basement fridge, too.

**Getting the temperature right**

Michael Berrigan said that 34 degrees is ideal. Edie Godfrey had two refrigerators full, but one froze. Oops! I had several containers freeze solid—bye, bye entries for vases of three. We learned that a refrigerator thermometer is a must, but that the normal ones aren't very accurate. My husband, Gary Cohen, took on the task of finding digital ones. He checked all the local gourmet cooking stores, but theirs were very pricey. Good old Google came through—Gary found a source online for about \$4 each, so we ordered a dozen, which I later gave to folks who exhibited. I found that 36 degrees worked best for me.

Anything's possible, if enough people put their minds to it.



[Margaret Macneale photographs]



### Checking the blooms, recutting stems and changing the water

I recut stems and changed the water weekly, but I learned the hard way that too much handling dooms the blooms (4 to 6 weeks is a long time!). There's a magic point where you just have to leave them alone and hope. While checking, we all learned to be ruthless about discarding blooms that were dying.

### Keeping humidity high in frost-free refrigerators

Everyone has their own tricks, but I have found wet towels and setting the containers in deep pans full of water helps a lot. Other people lightly spray the blooms or 'tent' them in plastic bags.

We picked and picked and groomed and groomed and packed refrigerators full. For me, it seemed as if I did nothing else after work each day but pick, groom, and carry blooms next door and to our basement. I ended up being able to enter blooms that were 4 weeks old, and a few 5 weeks, but that was pushing it. For me, nothing lasted longer than that. Michael Berrigan had predicted that Division 6s would last the best, and they did very well for most of us.

As all this went along, the weather just kept getting warmer and warmer. Finally May 15<sup>th</sup> arrived, a 74 degree day. Our gardens were well into Division 9s, but our refrigerators were full of daffodils. Some of our less experienced exhibitors didn't try to store blooms, so we had half the number of usual folks (10 vs. 20). But after all our hard work, we had a record number of stems (841, up 22% from the prior year), and an 11% increase in horticulture entries (334). Division 1s were few and far between, but most everything else was well represented, and of course the later divisions had many more blooms than ever before.

We love our host site, Bachman's Floral Home and Garden Center, because it has a climate controlled exhibit space, and it gets lots of gardener traffic. We asked the staff to make the room very cold, to keep the blooms as fresh as possible (at least through judging!). As Murphy's Law would have it, however, the air conditioning in the exhibit room died during Saturday afternoon! We kept thinking that the room was getting warmer, but we attributed it to the doors being open to the public. Lo and behold, before closing up the show Saturday evening, the staff told me that the cooling system had failed for that part of the building. I went home Saturday night expecting to come in Sunday morning to completely dead flowers, and the need to tear down the show immediately. But bless their hearts, Bachman's called in their staff and fixed it overnight! The exhibit room was nice and cool—the show could go on for the rest of the day.

Throughout the weekend, visitors were very surprised that we had

any blooms at all, as daffodils were long past in most people's gardens. We put up signs to explain what we had done to store the blooms. Every visitor was amazed! And we remain very proud that we persevered and beat Mother Nature at her own game. ❁

*Special thanks to the members of the Daffodil Society of Minnesota who stored blooms and exhibited: Michael Berrigan, Denis Dailey, Kathy Julius, Edie Godfrey, Sue Nyhammer, Sheryl Cohen, Gary Cohen, Margaret Macneale, Myrna Smith, and Ethel Smith.*



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