

Nowhere near Mississippi

Just saw my first snowdrops of the season, which alerts Southern horticulturalists that I am nowhere near my Mississippi garden, where real snowdrops grow poorly if at all.

True snowdrops, named Galanthus, are winter blooming bulbs with little teardrop shaped white flower buds that open up with two or three flattened outer “wings” and tiny green hearts on the smaller inner petals; they need a longer, cooler season than do our very common snowflakes (Leucojum), which have little green dots on bell-shaped white flowers.

In general, though many have tried, few gardeners in the Gulf South succeed with real snowdrops. Like with tulips and lily of the valley (another flower sometimes called snowdrops), their bulbs either fail to set flower buds or rot down here. I see them flowering up in higher elevations, and all the way into Canada, and in mild-but-long-cool winter Seattle, but rarely in Mississippi. And like I said, many have tried.

Don’t tell this to Aunt Mamie though, because for

all her life she has called snowflakes snowdrops. And my trouble with this isn’t that she’s wrong, it is that no one dares tell her that’s she’s been calling her bulbs by the wrong name all these decades. So, I let it slide to some extent.

I learned a long time ago that the horticulturist in me can alienate a big part of my mostly amateur gardening audience by getting too pedantic and technical. So, though I open myself up to being accused by my university peers of “dumbing down” science, I sometimes fudge a bit of on accuracy in favor of getting my points across.

Which is why I won’t argue with Aunt Mamie, because it’s not good enough to be right if it means being less effective.

Another case in point: All my gardening life I have grown countless daffodils, that Latin name of which is Narcissus; and I adore the differences between species including paperwhites, jonquils with their long, thin, quill-like leaves, trumpets, doubles, swept-back triandrus, and more. There is a huge variety in flower shapes. Yet I tolerate it when



SNOWDROPS UP NORTH



SNOWFLAKES

folks insist that only the white ones are Narcissus and the yellow ones are daffodils. Or buttercups, in spite of how so many different kinds of flowers are called this.

This usually doesn’t matter, except when newbie gardeners hear plants being called by the wrong folk names, and end up feeling like failures when what they order turns out to be something else that often don’t grow well or at all. It’s frustrating to see folks invest-

ing money, time, effort, and hope, planting bulbs that are doomed to flower once only, then fail to rebloom or disappear entirely.

Take it from this Mississippi gardener who has spent a lifetime studying and working with plants in all corners of our country, throughout the Tropics, and my “second home” in England: Regardless of our desires, we can’t grow them all in Mississippi’s climate, even some described as good for our

“zone” - which by the way, is the same as England’s; that tell you anything?

Truth is, we have some fabulous bulbs that are proven in our climate. Email me (RushingFelder@yahoo.com) for my free online brochure of the two dozen or so completely different kinds of winter, spring, summer, and fall flowering and foliage bulbs that actually do well in Mississippi, that multiply and spread and flower year

after year. It includes nearly three dozen utterly dependable cultivars of daffodils that have proven themselves in our climate, unlike the many that do not.

Call them what you want, but plant what they really are.

Felder Rushing is a Mississippi author, columnist, and host of the “Gestalt Gardener” on MPB Think Radio. Email gardening questions to rushingfelder@yahoo.com.

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