



**Shi Kesong (left) and his son pick narcissus for market at their Chongming nursery. — Ti Gong**



flower cultivation was considered decadent and forbidden. The Shi family had to throw away all its bulbs, with several local breeds becoming almost extinct.

Narcissus cultivation did not return to the fore until the 1980s, when 300 sacks of narcissus bulbs weighing more than 25 tons were planted on the island. The bulbs, imported from Fujian and Zhejiang provinces, didn't adapt well to the Chongming environment.

Shi Hao said his father, faced by a squeeze in household income, visited villages across Chongming, buying up what narcissus he could find for 0.01 yuan each and selling them for five times that price in downtown Shanghai.

"I had a bamboo shoulder pole to carry the flowers to the Shiliupu dock," Shi Kesong said. "Then I used a tricycle to carry them to market."

In the process, he noticed that the local breeds of the flowers grew much better. He carefully noted the names and the addresses of every local narcissus farmer, laying the foundation for his business today.

"My father ran a gardening business in the 1990s," said Shi Hao. "His work included the gardens at

Shanghai Grand Theater and Shanghai Concert Hall. Moving from one place to another, my father lost his sense of belonging to any project."

So in 2000, the elder Shi and his son returned to the work of their ancestors — growing narcissus. The map of growers his father had compiled years earlier proved a treasure. The pair visited all the farms listed on it and collected 1,250 kilograms of local-breed bulbs. By 2009, they had established a flower-growing cooperative.

"The villagers laughed at us and thought we were stupid," said the younger Shi.

But the family had the last laugh.

Its farm has grown from 0.2 hectares to 33 hectares, with nearly 110,000 square meters of greenhouses.

The Shi family participated in the 10th China Flower Expo held on Chongming Island last year, not far from their farm in the town of Xianghua.

With cold storage facilities for the bulbs — which require cold to bloom well — the family pioneered a technique to allow blossoms in different seasons of the year, even summer.



**Workers tend the flowers in giant greenhouses on the Shi family farm.**

The floral expo was a shot in the arm for the local narcissus industry. According to Shi, sales this year are expected to reach 6 million yuan (US\$940,000), with up to 80,000 pots of narcissus sold. That's almost twice the 2021 total.

"We can even tell which narcissus will bloom on the first day of the Lunar New Year," said Shi Kesong.

"Many of our customers have sent us messages expressing their desire for the flowers at that time because they are a good omen."

#### **Shi Kesong offers some tips on growing narcissus in pots:**

1. Let the plant bathe in sunshine for around six hours every day.
2. Keep the room temperature between 5 and 18 degrees Celsius.
3. Add water until the level reaches just below the base of the bulbs, but no higher or they will rot.
4. After the narcissus finish blooming, cut off 60 percent of their stems and roots, and plant the bulbs in soil for next year's flowering.

