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Print Page

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Nantucket's Daffodil Festival features parades, picnics, ball and show

For 42 years, Nantucket has dedicated an entire spring weekend to the celebration of daffodils, with the annual festival drawing thousands to the islands for a weekend of activities.

Daffodils are kind of a big deal on Nantucket.

For 42 years, the island has dedicated an entire spring weekend to the celebration of these beloved blossoms – with thousands of daffily lovers flocking to the **Daffodil Festival** each year.

It all started in 1974, when Jean MacAusland, a Nantucket summer resident and publisher of *Gourmet* magazine, began planting what would become over a million daffodil bulbs throughout the island.

"It was just (MacAusland's passion to populate the island with daffodils," says Jean Cawley, marketing and membership director for the Nantucket Chamber of Commerce, which sponsors the Daffodil Festival. "This was her way to add to the beauty of Nantucket."

"The Daffodil Festival is really a celebration of spring," Cawley says. And there's something for everyone to do, she adds, during the celebration from Friday morning through Sunday night. The biggest draw: the annual Antique Car Parade, which starts at 9:30 a.m. Saturday and is a festival staple.

"We take between 100 and 115 cars that are 25 years or older, and they line up on Main Street in town," she says. At noon, those vintage cars – bedecked in daffodils – make their way down Nantucket's famous Orange Street in front of a sea of onlookers, who are often dressed in costume.

"Some people will wear all-yellow ball gowns," Cawley explains. One year, "two women dressed themselves as daffodil flowers. A bunch of kids went out last year as carrots and celery and other vegetables."

The parade ultimately stretches for seven miles before reaching 'Sconset for the Tailgate Picnic, where the cars and picnics are judged and awarded ribbons.

"People just show up and start playing music," Cawley says of the picnic. "That is definitely the big event."

Saturday, though, features a jam-packed schedule of festival events for the whole family. In addition to the Antique Car Parade, there is the annual Children's Parade, followed by the annual Hat Pageant, as well as the 7th Annual Daffy Dog Parade. The Children's Beach Family Picnic is its own mini festival, featuring live music, balloon artists, a pirate talk, a puppet show and a fire truck ride around Brant Point.

For those passionate about the flowers themselves, the Nantucket Garden Club will host the 42nd annual Daffodil Flower Show from 2 to 5 p.m. Saturday and 10 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Sunday at Bartlett's Farm. Anyone can enter the show with daffodils, whether in the arrangement, horticulture or photography categories.

"If you're in the flower world, it's a huge deal," Cawley says of the show. "The judges fly in from all over the country. There are several different awards to be won, and it's stiff competition."

New to this year's festival will be the "Goin' Gatsby Cabaret" ball Saturday night at the Nantucket Hotel & Resort. Featuring dinner, drinks and dancing, the event will benefit the Addiction Solutions Fund to help fight the opioid problem on the Cape & Islands. Attendees are encouraged to dress in their best 1920s-inspired frocks in the spirit of the F. Scott Fitzgerald novel "The Great Gatsby."

Also offered during the festival: scavenger hunts, wine tastings and walking tours – including The Original Nantucket Ghost Walk and many tours that offer a historical guide to the island. The Daffodil 5K Race will be held at Codfish Park on Sunday. Throughout the festival, daffily-themed decorations will adorn storefronts along Nantucket's main streets.

With wintertime behind us all, Cawley says, the Daffodil Festival re-energizes the Nantucket community.

"It's great for our merchants and restaurants and our local community because everybody opens for that weekend," she says. "And after a long, cold winter of not making any money, it's a kick-off to their season."



Dressing up in flowery finery is half the fun for many visitors to Nantucket's Daffodil Festival. MIKE GALVIN

If you go

What: 42nd annual Daffodil Festival When: Friday through Sunday Where: Various locations throughout Nantucket Information: nantucketchamber.org

<http://www.capecodtimes.com/article/20160428/ENTERTAINMENTLIFE/160429565>

Print Page