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# Across the Fence: Daffodils

APRIL 3, 2020 BY [SUSANNE BACON](#) — [LEAVE A COMMENT](#)

The other day, our sweet next-door neighbor and friend, Anita, gave us flowers from her garden – bright yellow daffodils. I placed them in a vase on our dining table, and they seemed to be a spot of sunlight in their own right. It made the cheerful setting even more cheerful. And it made me think of the ancient German church hymn that claims that tulips and daffodils are prettier than all of King Solomon's silks.

Die Regensburger Domspatzen singen "Geh aus, m...



Indeed, daffodils are messengers of spring and are also called Osterglocken (pronounce 'oh-sta-glock-kuhn, meaning Easter bells). And they come in all kind of color combinations of whites, yellows, and oranges, even pinks; some are also fragrant. Daffodils belong to the Amaryllis family and have the genus name of Narcissus, which is pretty close to the German term Narzisse, which is also in use. Nobody really knows where the term comes from. Some hold with the myth about

the youth Narcissus, who fell in love with his own reflection on water. Where he drowned, the flowers sprang. Yet, according to Pliny the Elder, the plant was named for its fragrance – “narkao” is Greek for “I grow numb”. (Yes, no coincidence about the term “narcotics” either.) In fact, narcissi were known as such long before the myth appeared. The name daffodil, by the way, is derived from the Greek word “asphodelos” – nobody knows why the “d” was ever added in front of it; the meaning seems to have to do with death.



THIS TIME OF YEAR NATURE SWITCHES TO A LOT OF GOLDEN HUES – THE DAFFODIL IS ONE OF THEM.  
(PHOTO: MISSMUSHROOM AT [UNSPLASH.COM/](https://unsplash.com/))

Already popular among the antique peoples, narcissi aka daffodils became a must-have for European spring gardens in the early 1500s. Which is what started cultivation on a larger scale. But there is more to the pretty flowers on their leafless stalks than just looks. They contain different alkaloids. Depending on the amounts of intake, the plants can be even lethal to cattle, goats, pigs, cats, and humans. (Apparently the taste is vile; and who would do this to themselves anyhow?!) Even just being planted in daffodils’ vicinity may cost you your garden’s cabbages and roses. And if you are a gardener or florist, you may want to wear gloves when dealing with the gorgeous flowers, as they might cause you skin irritation. Even the scent can bring about headaches and worse. But a coin always has two sides, right?



DAFFODILS OR NARCISSI ALSO GO BY THE NAME OF ESTER BELLS IN SOME COUNTRIES. (PHOTO: MONIKA GRABKOWSKA AT [UNSPLASH.COM/](https://unsplash.com/))

Daffodil extracts are an important medical ingredient for all kinds of medications. As early as 460 B.C., daffodils were used in tumor treatment in Greece. The bulb was used for topical uses all over Europe and in China in later centuries. The flowers were used as decongestant, antispasmodic, even as remedy against baldness and as an aphrodisiac (I wonder why something that tastes vile would be used as that, but each to their own). Burns, bruises, freckles, splinters, contraception, epilepsy, whooping cough – the list of usages goes on and on. Reading it makes you fall into a trance almost – another of the many effects daffodils are supposed to have. But they ARE true

miracle-workers. Modern medicine uses its extracts for a number of fields, and it is no wonder that numerous cancer societies use it as their symbol. Alzheimer patients benefit from the plant as well.



DAFFODILS PUT A TOUCH OF SUNSHINE TO THE HOME EVEN ON A GRAY DAY. (PHOTO: CHRISTOHER MARTYN AT [UNSPLASH.COM/](https://unsplash.com/))

What else have I learned about the flowers that brighten up my dining table? They are the national flower of Wales. In the western hemisphere they symbolize vanity, in eastern cultures wealth and good fortune. They decorate ancient Egyptian tombs as well as frescoes in Pompeii. Blooming along the river Styx, according to Greek mythology, they have also been associated with death. The daffodil ranges on the same level of western literary celebration with the rose and the lily. In religious art they represent also the hope in resurrection, as they are perennials and bloom around Easter. And there is even a Swedish rock band called “The Daffodils (no, I have never heard of them before, either).

In short, I will look at daffodils differently from now on. Washingtonians have been planting these perennials almost from the very settling of this state. These days, you can see wild daffodils all along the I-5 corridor as well. In other years, we’d be prepping for daffodil parades all over Western Washington now. We can still celebrate these special flowers – maybe even more respectfully now.

