A guide to the Daffodils of Thriplow

Paul Earnshaw
“He that has two cakes of bread let him sell one of them for some flowers of the Daffodil, for bread is food for the body but Daffodils are food for the soul”

Attributed to Prophet Mohammed cAD570 - 632
Introduction

The daffodil is one of the beautiful first flowers of spring. The appearance of its distinctive yellow blooms is a sure sign that winter has either ended or is about to end soon. Daffodils reappear faithfully in Thriplow every year and not just in gardens but along road sides, in the churchyard, on the triangles and in the playpark where they were planted often decades ago. They survive the worst of the weather that winter provides and come smiling through to bless our village with splashes of colour that brighten even the dullest of days and let the villagers know that Daffodil Weekend is just around the corner!

There are a host of daffodils - hundreds of thousands - from diminutive grassy-leaved gems with the flowers the size of a fingernail to jaunty giants with flowers the size of a coffee cup. They bloom in colours from pure white through all the shades of yellow to bright orange and pale pink to red. Sometimes a tall stem supports a single specimen; sometimes a cluster of small blossoms is a bouquet in itself. Many daffodils have clear sweet fragrances unique in springtime.

This short booklet charts the remarkable story of the Daffodils of Thriplow, explaining how this small, beautiful South Cambridgeshire village came to be world-famous for its displays of daffodils. It also gives basic guidance on how to plant and care for daffodils. Perhaps most importantly of all it will show you where to go to see all of the different varieties in the village of Thriplow.

With thanks to everyone who makes Thriplow, without question the best place in the world to live.

Paul Earnshaw
Day 44 of lockdown 2020

Left: Daffodils in the snow on School Lane, March 2018
The daffodil in history

It is not certain where the first daffodil bloomed but it is likely that it first appeared in south west Europe about 29 million years ago (in the late Oligocene period) - long before humans walked the earth.

In around 300BC the ancient Greek philosopher and botanist Theophrastus listed various daffodil strains in his nine volume magnum opus, Enquiry into Plants. Theophrastus used the word “nardissos” to describe the daffodil which the Romans transmuted into “narcissus” and it is the Romans who were responsible for introducing the daffodil to Britain.

The botanical name Narcissus is often said to derive from the classical tale of Narcissus, who was blessed with eternal beauty. It’s more likely that the name Narcissus derives from the Greek word narkao (numbness) on account of the narcotic properties of daffodil bulbs. The bulbs are highly poisonous and, if eaten, can cause vomiting. The bulb extract, if applied to an open wound, causes numbness of the whole nervous system and heart paralysis. The flowers are also slightly poisonous and the sap is toxic to other flowers. One often reported “fact” is that some Roman soldiers may have included daffodil bulbs in their kit which could be employed as a suicide pill in the event of capture. Even so, death by narcissus is a relatively unusual affair. The Roman Emperor Commodus was killed in his bathtub (AD192) at the hands of an elite wrestler called Narcissus (upon whom Russell Crowe’s character in the film Gladiator is based) - but that doesn’t really count.

There are many schools of thought as to where the name “daffodil” rather than “narcissus” originated. One such school is that daffodil originated from Affodyle, which means “that which cometh early”. That’s a much nicer version than the one coming from the Latin affodilus...a plant that grew in the fields of the underworld and belonged to Persephone, the Queen of Hell. There is no technical distinction between using the name “narcissus” and “daffodil.”
It’s not all doom and gloom though where the poor daffodil is concerned. It also has many beneficial uses and was used in days gone by to relieve whooping cough and bronchitis, and as a poultice to heal burns and wounds. Wealthy women used the yellow flower dye to tint their hair and eyebrows. Nowadays, it’s grown commercially in Powys, Wales for the production of Galanthamine, an alkaloid used in drugs for Alzheimer’s. Daffodil compounds are also being researched as a treatment for depression at the University of Copenhagen. It’s even used as payment on the Isles of Scilly, as annually one daffodil is given to the Prince of Wales as rent for any unattended land.
Thriplow Daffodil Weekend

Thriplow Daffodil Weekend started in 1969 when the church needed major roof repairs. Residents decided to raise funds by opening their gardens and making cups of tea for their visitors. They made an amazing £206 and were so delighted they decided to do it all again the following year - and so the Thriplow Daffodil Weekend was born.

Thriplow Daffodil Weekend & Country Fair is a traditional country fete but super sized. It provides wholesome family entertainment in a beautiful village setting. Our visitors tell us it’s the unique Thriplow welcome combined with the lovely village location that keeps them coming back year after year. There’s so much to do and see, it’s easy to spend the whole day walking around the village entertainments.

Daffodil Weekend is all about raising funds for local charities and community projects. We have raised more than £500,000 over the last 51 years. Each year, local charities within 30 miles of Thriplow are invited to apply to become the Daffodil Weekend Trust nominated charity for the coming weekend.

It takes over 400 kind-hearted and very fabulous volunteers (only 350 people live in the village of Thriplow itself) to put on the two-day Daffodil Weekend, with many people often working a number of shifts to cover the weekend. By the end of each day, everyone is totally shattered but happy. The friendliness and warm-heartedness of our visitors keep us going. Daffodil Weekend has been described as the glue that brings our community together.
In Autumn 2012 The Daffodil Weekend Committee starting planning for the 50th celebration (due to take place in 2019) with two major projects. One was the mass planting scheme and the other was the creation of an official new variety of daffodil to be called Thriplow Gold. The idea was to create the new variety and produce enough bulbs to create a mass display for show at the 50th Daffodil Weekend.

The task to create the new hybrid was passed to the Fowlmere and Thriplow Gardening Club Chaired by Mary Duff. Mary with the help of horticulturist Peter Jackson contacted Ron Scamp a leading British expert daffodil bulb producer in Cornwall. Scamp has registered over 400 new hybrids and has over 2,700 bulb varieties under cultivation at his Falmouth Farm. Scamp was able to supply a special hybrid for Thriplow as he had a small stock of new unnamed unregistered varieties available. Thriplow Gold was officially registered in 2016 as 1-Y-Y and mass planted around the village sign. Thriplow Golds pedigree is shown above.
Describing a daffodil

The daffodils flowering in Thriplow are classified according to the RHS system created in 1950. In this system all daffodils are split into 13 divisions (described in more detail on pages 8-10). Then each flower is described using a simple code system for the colour of the perianth (petal) and the corona (cup or trumpet). For example a daffodil may be described as:

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1 Y - Y
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Division number | Perianth colour | Corona Colour

The colour abbreviations are:

- W - White or whitish
- G - Green
- Y - Yellow
- P - Pink
- O - Orange
- R - Red

This description is actually Thriplow Gold!
Daffodil Classifications

There are over 27,000 registered varieties of daffodils. Over the years various schemes of classifying daffodils have been proposed of which the one set out by the Daffodil Committee of the RHS in 1950 has lasted the course. It is a mixture of classification on the basis of plant form and genetic origin. The various divisions into which daffodils are split are summarised below. Representatives of every division can be seen in the village of Thriplow.

**Division 1: Trumpet**

One flower per stem. Trumpet (corona) at least as long as or longer than the petals (perianth).

*Examples you can see in the village include Thriplow Gold, Dutch Master and King Alfred*

**Division 2: Large Cupped**

One flower per stem. Trumpet is at least one third the length of, but shorter than the petals.

*Examples you can see in the village include Carlton, Banallan and Ella*

**Division 3: Small cupped**

One flower per stem. Trumpet is not more than one third the length of the petals.

*Examples you can see in the village include Firebrand and Barrett Browning*

**Division 4: Double**

One or more often sweetly fragrant flowers per stem, with the trumpet and petals, or just the trumpet replaced by petal like structures.

*Examples you can see include Van Sion and Rip van Winkle*
**Division 5: Triandrus**

Two to six flowers per stem. Nodding flowers with short, sometimes straight-sided trumpets and narrow reflexed petals.  
*Examples you can see in the village include Jetfire and Itzim*

**Division 6: Cyclamineus**

One or two flowers per stem. Trumpet often has a flared rim. Petals are narrow, pointed and prominently reflexed and flower hangs at an acute angle to the stem.  
*Examples you can see in the village include Jetfire and Itzim*

**Division 7: Jonquil**

Two or more sweetly scented flowers per stem. Petals reflexed or spreading, trumpet is short, sometimes flared, usually wider than it is long.  
*Examples you can see in the village include Quail and Pipit*

**Division 8: Tazetta**

Three to twenty, sweetly fragrant flowers per stem. Trumpets are small and often straight sided, petals are broad and mostly pointed.  
*Examples you can see in the village include Martinette and Ziva*

**Division 9: Poeticus**

Usually one but sometimes two fragrant flowers per stem. Trumpets are small and coloured with a pronounced rim, and the petals are glistening white.  
*Examples you can see in the village include Actaea*

**Division 10: Bulbocodium**

Usually one flower per stem. With insignificant petals and large, widely flaring trumpets.  
*Examples you can see in the village include China Gold*
Division 11a: Split Cups

Solitary flower with trumpets split for more than half their length
Subdivision 11a “Collar”: Overlapping segments of the cup lie against the petals, usually in two whorls.
Examples you can see in the village include Sunny Girlfriend

Division 11b: Split Corona

Solitary flower with trumpets split for more than half their length
Subdivision 11b “Papillon”: Narrower trumpet segments have tips arranged at the margin of the petals, usually in a single whorl of six

Division 12: Other

This is for the miscellaneous cultivars which do not fit in the other classifications.
Examples you can see in the village include Tete a Tete

Division 13: Other

This classification is for the cultivars distinguished solely by botanical name.
Examples you can see in the village include Pheasant Eye and Narcissus Pseudonarcissus

Far left: Preparing the Church triangle for planting
Middle left: Van Sion growing near the village green
Left: Dutch Master on Fowlmere Road
Where to find the daffodils

Some daffodils may not be in flower or have died back. Not all variants in the village are shown. Locations are approximate.

There are many more displays of unknown varieties around the village e.g. on Farm Lane and Church Street

Brackets indicate variety is planted in a container and may not be on display
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<th>Description</th>
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<th>Location</th>
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<td>1 W-W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tete de Luxe</td>
<td>(15) (23)</td>
<td>12 Y-Y</td>
<td>Yellow Cheer</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4 Y-Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>5 W-W</td>
<td>Yellow Cheerfulness</td>
<td>(23)</td>
<td>4 Y-Y</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thalia Minature</td>
<td>(5)</td>
<td>5 W-W</td>
<td>Ziva</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>8 W-W</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Left: Some of the many varieties of daffodils planted in tubs on display outside the “nerve centre” of the Daffodil Weekend committee
How to grow and care for daffodils

Daffodils will happily grow in well-drained soil in borders, containers, window boxes, naturalised in grass, or even indoors. Plant by early October to ensure a healthy display next spring. Here are our top tips and tricks for growing daffodils.

1. Plant daffodils to the right depth
Plant bulbs with the pointy end facing up to a depth of about 10cm (4in) - or to about three times the height of the bulb. The depth plays an important part in the success of your daffodils. Plant too shallow and you run the risk of having divided bulbs and ‘flopping’ stems. Plant too deep and your daffodils might never emerge. If in doubt, err on the deeper side.

2. Deadhead faded daffodil blooms
Once your flowers are past their best, deadhead them (including the ovary - see page 7) to give the bulbs a chance to save their energy for next spring.

3. Don’t be too quick to cut back foliage when flowering is over
Once the bloom is finished and you’ve cut or deadheaded the flowers, the bulb uses its foliage to create energy for next year. Leave them alone for six weeks, or until the leaves start to turn yellow and deteriorate. Cutting back leaves or mowing naturalised daffs too early will result in a poor crop or no flowers next spring.

4. Split daffodil bulbs that are not flowering
Daffodils may fail to bloom, or come up ‘blind’ for a number of reasons. If they were successful in previous years, the most likely cause for not flowering is that the bulbs have multiplied and become too crowded. Try digging them up and dividing. If they’ve never flowered, it’s likely they were planted too late, the bulbs were too small, or they’re not getting enough sunshine.

5. Try miniature varieties if your daffodils keep drooping
Daffodils withstand most harsh weather, but they sometimes take too much of a battering to carry on! If you haven’t got a sheltered location to protect your plants from flopping in the wind and rain, try growing a miniature variety instead.
You might also check the depth of your bulbs - another possible reason for drooping daffodils is that the bulbs weren’t planted deep enough.
Below are a selection of the most popular and easy to grow daffodils. If grass will grow there then these daffodils will grow there. All of these varieties can be found in the village.

**The best all round, tried and tested**
- Carlton
- Dutch Master
- King Alfred
- Ice Follies (white)
- Mount Hood (white)
- Falconet

**Dwarf varieties**
- Hawera
- Jack Snipe
- Jetfire
- Tete a Tete

**Good for growing in pots indoors**
- Cheerfulness
- Yellow Cheerfulness

**Early but robust**
- February Gold
- Itzim

**Good for naturalising**
- Thalia
- Tresamble
- Narcissus pseudonarcissus

**The authors favourite**
- Medway Gold (although this one is more difficult to grow)

*Medway Gold. The smallest daffodil in the UK*
A village daffodil walk

Historic site

Jetfire growing on Lower Street

Rip Van Winkle growing on Farm Lane

Daffodil display
Walk distance: approx. 1.5 miles  
Start: Village Green  
Conditions: Mostly flat with some footpaths that may be uneven and slippery if wet

Numbers in circles indicate historical sites, numbers in squares indicate the location of daffodils.

Thriplow, pronounced “Triplow”, is an ancient village with evidence of settlement as far back as the bronze age (2500 – 700BC). The name “Thriplow” is thought to have originated from “Trippa’s Law”. Trippa was the local Ancient Britain Chief and founder of the village and “Law” means “sacred mound”. How Thriplow got its “h” is less clear and you should treat with caution any explanations you may see. Trippa might be buried in the tumulus that can be seen behind the church.

Early records tell of a Saxon Earlderman, Byrhtnoth bequeathing the lands of Thriplow to the Bishop of Ely in return for shelter in 991AD on the eve of the battle of Maldon against the Vikings.

1 The walk starts at the village green in the centre of the village, where the village sign shows our connections with Saxons, the church, rare orchids, grasslands and, of course, daffodils. The old smithy next to the sign was given to the village in 1963 and is now used as a small museum by the Thriplow Society and is open with a working furnace and blacksmith at Daffodil Weekend.

2 The sign is surrounded by Thriplow Gold daffodils (1 Y-Y) which are unique to the village. More information about Thriplow Gold can be found on page 6.

With thanks to Bernard Meggit and Shirley Wittering for the inspiration for this walk.
Across the road in front of One The Green (20 yards to the left of the war memorial), you can see an example of the Van Sion daffodil (4 Y-Y), one of the oldest daffodil types, first noted in records in 1629). This example was originally looked after by Brian, our much missed Safety Officer from the Daffodil Weekend Committee.

On the corner of the road junction is the village hall, which is on the site of the Red Lion pub - a jettied Tudor house that burnt down in 1942 - one of five pubs in the village in the 19th/20th centuries! Opposite the village hall is the village shop, which is community owned.

If you continue a little way up Middle Street you will see many different varieties of daffodil displayed in tubs (on the left hand side, just after the sharp bend to the right) and on the bank (on the right hand side of the road, in front of a field). This is a good place to start to work out which is your favourite!

Now retrace your steps back to the village green and at the T-junction turn right and walk in a north-easterly direction along School Lane.

Soon on your left you will go past Thriplow Meadows’ Nature Reserve which has many wild flowers including examples of rare marsh orchids and the bog pimpernel.

Further along the road on the left are examples of the Golden Anniversary (2 Y-Y) daffodil, which were planted in the 50th year of Daffodil Weekend.

Around the bench on the right you can see examples of the Rip Van Winkle (4 Y-Y) daffodil. Very unusual yet beautiful, Narcissus 'Rip van Winkle' features double, multi-petalled, golden-yellow flowers, so fluffy that their finely-divided petals give them the look of a Chrysanthemum.

After passing the village school on your left, the pavement finishes. Walk up the short hill, crossing over to the right side of the road for safety.

Above right: Some of the tubs of daffodils on display in Middle Street
Bottom right: It's not just daffodils! The Northern Marsh Orchid Dactylorhiza Purpurella can be found in the Thriplow Nature Reserve
The road triangle ahead is planted with the daffodil variety known as Karenza. This variety was selected for this key position as it flowers relatively early - ideal for Daffodil Weekends in March.

Ahead you will see the iconic Anno Domini house, which was enlarged in 1687 when the jettied upper story was added.

Turn left at the triangle, following the road in the direction of Newton, and almost immediately turn right up a small track heading to the church.

The Church of St George or All Saints is built on a tumulus and has views over the surrounding countryside. The font and transept are Norman. The church was damaged in 1643 under Cromwell’s “cleansing of popery” and extensively restored in 1875 including the beautiful painted ceiling.

Return down the track and turn left back to Anno Domini and continue in a straight line into Church Street.

On the right is “Daffodil Cottage” built on the site of the village guild hall

Ignore the footpath to your right and continue along Church Street.

Further on the right is Bacon’s Farm, named after a Manor from 1327 but rebuilt in the 16th century.
On the right you will see a display of many different varieties of daffodils including WP Milner, Tete a Tete, February Gold, Jetfire, Jack Snipe, Pueblo, Baby Moon and Canaliculatus.

Further up Church Street on the left is “Honeysuckle Cottage” which was previously called “Careless”, possibly after William Careless, mentioned in 1279.

Turn right on the public footpath just after the pink-painted house on the right, just before Manor Farm.

Manor Farm is a well-preserved Tudor building, previously St John’s College Farm. Follow the leafy footpath through trees with fields on either side, passing through a kissing gate. You now enter a field (often with some sheep, so do keep any dogs on a lead).

Further up Church Street outside KWS is a fine display of Pheasants Eye (13 W-OY). Pheasant Eye is a fragrant bloom of white petals with small yellow cups with red edges. This variety is often the last to flower in the village.

Along the footpath you will see examples of Jedna, Binkie, Golden Harvest and Lothario. These varieties were selected for planting here as they are (hopefully) more tolerant of shade.

Keep walking in a straight line towards another kissing gate and glance to your right through some trees where you will see Thriplow Manor (once known as Barenton’s Manor) which had a moat and was once owned by St John’s College as a retreat in the plague periods. Once through the kissing gate turn right on to Middle Street.

As you walk down the street on the left is the Tithe Barn dating from the 1320s (originally thatched but now with a corrugated iron roof) which was part of the once-moated Rectory Farm. The original Rectory Farm was once owned by the Bishop of Ely but now a modern house has replaced the older one.
A little further on, turn left down a narrow public footpath between the houses. This footpath is now known as Narrow Lane but was previously called Stinky Lane. It takes you through a wooded area but if you look to your right after the houses you can see a meadow known as Peck’s Half Acre. This field was given to Francis Peck in 1636 for “the upkeep of the poor”.

Turn left at the end of the footpath into Lower Street and walk past three houses on your left.

On your left you will see the well-restored 16th century house known as Bassets.

Turn around and walk back down Lower Street.

Just after the road bends to the left you will see the much-restored Cochranes Tudor manor house on the left with preserved octagonal chimneys.

Just before the house on the left you will see many small groups of daffodils planted against the wall, behind which is the garden of Cochranes. This is an unusually sheltered spot and these are often the first daffodils to come in to flower in the village - flowering daffodils have been reported here on Christmas Day!

Turn left pass the pub and 4 houses up you will see a collection of unusual miniature daffodils planted in pots.

Finish the walk at the Green Man pub. This pub was originally known as The Spade and Gardener and dates back to the 18th century. It was purchased in 2013 by Thriplow villagers and leased out as a pub. The pub keeps its own pigs and cattle which then appear on the menu. The Green Man offers a range of real ales and good quality food - booking ahead is advised!
Want to find out more?

If you want to find out more about Daffodil Weekend then please visit our website:

https://www.thriplowdaffodils.org.uk

If you have a direct enquiry about Daffodil Weekend then please e mail the following:

**General enquiries:** daffodilweekend1@gmail.com  
**Stall enquiries:** thriplowstalls@gmail.com  
**Coach enquiries:** thriplowcoaches@gmail.com  
**Classic cars:** vintage@thriplow@gmail.com  
**Volunteering:** thriplowvolunteers@gmail.com  
**Marketing:** marketing.daffodil.weekend@gmail.com

You can find out much more about the history of Thriplow at:

https://www.thriplow.org.uk/thriplow-society/

Here you can also purchase the book “Thriplow Daffodil Weekend at 50” which contains much more about the history of Daffodil Weekend.

If you want to find out more about daffodils in general then these links may help:

https://thedaffodilsociety.com/  
https://www.rhs.org.uk/plants/popular/daffodils/growing-guide  
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Narcissus_(plant)

£2.00