

Nature on our doorsteps: Are Daffodils useful to pollinators?

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By Rosaleen Dwyer

Rosaleen Dwyer is the County Heritage Officer at South Dublin County Council – every week she gives us an insight into the natural heritage around us and the beautiful biodiversity of the plants and creatures

One of our most iconic springtime flowers is the Daffodil. As it can flower as early as February, it would be good if this flower offered lots of pollen and nectar for early bumblebees.

Unfortunately, this is not the case.



A swathe of dancing Daffodils on the Old Bawn Road

The evolution of wildflowers occurs over a long time in close association with the insect pollinators in their local environment.

We like to breed new varieties from these wild species, however, looking for bigger blooms, more petals, and unusual colour combinations.

As a result of intense breeding, the original small, wild, yellow-trumpeted Daffodil flower now looks quite plain compared with modern Daffodil hybrids. These come in many combinations of yellows, oranges, whites, long trumpets, short trumpets, double centres, and extra tall and dwarf sizes.

This intense breeding comes at a cost to the plant. Many hybrid Daffodils are sterile, or they produce so little pollen and nectar that they are of little use to pollinators.



Bumblebees will still visit Daffodils, but usually only when there is nothing better in flower

While insects might still come to visit, they receive little (or no) reward for their efforts, wasting crucial energy early in the season when little else is in flower.

We can still enjoy the beauty of hybrid Daffodils, however, while making sure that we also plant Snowdrops, Crocuses, and Grape Hyacinth (Muscari). These bulbs are much more useful to our early pollinators.

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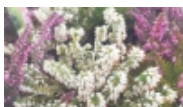
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