

# Brian Minter: Lots of heart and beauty at Bradner's 90th Flower Show

Bradner Flower Show, celebrating its 90th anniversary in 2018, honours the beauty and diversity of narcissus.



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# Bradner Flower Show

When: *April 13-15, 10 a.m. to 5 p.m.*

Where: *Bradner Community Hall, 5305 Bradner Road, Abbotsford.*

Tickets and info: \$2, [bradnerhall.ca \(http://www.bradnerhall.ca/events.html\)](http://www.bradnerhall.ca/events.html)

Something very special is happening soon in scenic and historic Bradner, a unique community on the outskirts of Abbotsford.



Over 400 varieties of unique and beautiful narcissus will be featured at Bradner Flower Show. VAN NOORT BULB COMPANY / PNG

Bradner Flower Show, celebrating its 90th anniversary this year, is one of the most charming events in B.C. to honour the beauty and diversity of narcissus. Members of the narcissus/daffodil family are among the earliest bulbs to bloom after the long, cold months of winter and narcissus have long been recognized as harbingers of spring and symbols of rebirth and renewal.

With a lengthy tradition of growing narcissus, Bradner is still home to many daffodil growers who supply millions of cut flowers to the Canadian market. As the weather warms up, you'll see beautiful fields of yellow in and around Bradner Road; it's quite a sight.

The show began in 1928 when local Fenwick Fatkin encouraged fellow growers to show their daffodils in their small community hall. Ten varieties arranged on card tables was the sum total of the show. Over the next decade the show continued to grow. In 1941 it moved to Abbotsford to accommodate more visitors. The Bradner Bulb Growers Association, the Abbotsford Board of Trade and the Department of Agriculture became early sponsors to support this increasingly popular event.

After the difficult times of Second World War, the show reopened in Abbotsford but returned to Bradner in 1950. In 1960, the citizens of Bradner

got behind the building of a new, much larger community hall, which continues to serve the area today. This weekend event typically attracts up to 8,500 visitors, with a record attendance of 10,000.

You have to know some of the community members to understand how this show has survived 90 years. Among the residents there exists a spirit of coming together on a volunteer basis to continue the heritage of this occasion. No one receives any remuneration, rather it's a sense of community pride that drives this event. It's not just the older folks, but family members of all ages who work hard to ensure this show is of the highest quality. When the exhibition wraps up on Sunday evening, it's a tradition to have a dinner for all the volunteers to thank them for exemplifying the community spirit of Bradner.

Timing for the show is always an issue because weather is such a big factor. The bloom times of the bulbs can vary up to three weeks, depending on the temperature — if it's too cold, the blooms are delayed, or if spring temperatures arrive early, it's hard to hold back their prime-time display. This year, our cold, wet spring has been factored in and the show dates have been set back one week from other years. No matter the weather, these dedicated folks always pull the rabbit out of the hat and create thrilling displays.



A mix of narcissus. *HANDOUT / VANCOUVER SUN*

What is there to see at the show? Whether you are an experienced gardener or a novice, you will discover some amazing types of daffodils and narcissus — over 400 varieties — and many will blow you away. Over the past 15 years, the show has expanded to include arts and crafts and plant sales. Some great speakers are scheduled, as well as chef demonstrations. To feature the growing wine industry in the valley, tastings will be offered, and new this year is a bar so folks can enjoy some adult refreshments. The organizers have worked hard to make the show a family inclusive event with fun entertainment.

This year's chairwoman Pauline Isherwood, who is Fenwick Fatkin's granddaughter, shared some of her memories with me. What has been consistent over the years is the amazing number of unique varieties of narcissus. She also recalled the great people who have opened the show in the past, such as the late Dr. Grace McCarthy, David Lam and meteorologist Mark Madryga, who was a lot of fun, as were many others.

Has anything out of the ordinary ever occurred over the show's long history?

"Not much really. We're pretty tame in Bradner," says Isherwood

There have been challenge: Isherwood remembers the windstorm in 2007 that blew the big tent way down Bradner Road. Another year, when it was especially wet, the lawns had been aerated just before the show creating a sea of mud. One year it was so hot the poor horse that drew the carriage got a sunburnt nose.

Isherwood estimates between 100 and 200 acres of daffodils are still grown in Bradner, which, along with those produced in Saanich, accounts for much of Canada's daffodil crop. Dave Sheppard was one of Bradner's finest narcissus breeders, and now Matt Groves has taken on this role. He will be on hand at the show to answer questions about these amazing new varieties.

I had the honour of officially opening the show, and with this year's theme "Blast from the Past," it's a good time to remember its great legacy. Try to take in this special anniversary show, it has a lot of heart and beauty.