

Yellow alert! Daff killer is on the march: Increase of bug that burrows into bulbs before eating them from the inside is blamed on warm weather

- Narcissus fly larvae burrows into bulbs and eats them from inside
- Used to be isolated in South East but now being found in Scotland
- There is no pesticide to prevent gardens becoming infested

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22

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A daffodil-destroying bug is on the march and is spreading through more and more British gardens.

Entire beds of daffodils in back gardens, city centre parks, even on moorland hills, are being reduced to drooping disasters within days by the larvae of the large narcissus fly.

The pest used to be confined to the Scilly Isles and Cornwall but - thanks in part to councils planting huge swathes of daffodils on every available patch of land - it has become widespread and is now turning up as far north as Scotland.



The narcissus fly lays eggs on the leaves of daffodils. After hatching the larvae burrow down into the bulbs



The larvae then eat the bulb from the inside before crawling out, pupating in the soil, then emerging as flies

It lays eggs which hatch into larvae which burrow into the daffodil bulb and munch it from the inside.

The 116-year-old Daffodil Society has warned there is 'now no chemical preventative or curative for this pest available to the amateur grower' to head off the crisis.

The society says: 'Once this was considered a serious pest only in the South-West of the British mainland.

'However, in recent years as a result of 'global warming' and/or the influence of large plantings of daffodils by public authorities, it has now become a common problem even in the North of Scotland.'

The fly, which resembles a small bumble bee, is easily recognised by the high pitched whine it emits in flight. It is only active when the temperatures are in excess of 68F (20C) on windless days.

Eggs are laid on the daffodil foliage near to ground level and hatch in seven days. At this point the larvae crawls down and enters the bulb by chewing through the base plate, where it remains, increasing in size by eating the centre of the bulb.

It emerges from the bulb in March to pupate in the ground, and the adult flies emerges in April and May.

The daffodil society recommends checking if your bulbs have turned soft, which indicates there is already a grub inside, or for small holes near the base plate which means it has recent been infested.

The society says that pouring hot water over the bulbs will kill the grubs, but by then the damage has already been done.



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The bug used to be confined to Cornwall and Devon, but is now found as far north as Scotland thanks largely to an increase in councils across the country planting daffodils

A spokesman added: 'Should this pest be a particular problem in your local area then consideration should be given to covering the beds with either fleece or enviromesh to prevent the fly reaching the foliage to lay its eggs.'

'It must be remembered that this will not be effective against flies that emerge from the ground when the cover is in place.'

'It is also worth noting that this fly also use snowdrops as a host plant and this may be the reason for localised troublesome populations.'

The Royal Horticultural Society said: 'None of the pesticides available to amateur gardeners will control the fly larvae.'

'Adult bulb flies like warm sheltered places, so the level of infestation can be reduced by growing daffodils in more shaded and exposed places.'

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'And after flowering, firm down the soil around the plants to make it less easy for female flies to deposit their eggs.'

'Avoid introducing large narcissus bulb fly and other bulb problems into your garden by buying firm, good quality bulbs from reputable suppliers.'

'Newly acquired high value bulbs can be protected by covering them with insect-proof nets such as Enviromesh, during mid-May to June when the female flies are laying eggs.'

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