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a brief history of daffodils

Posted in All Gardening Advice, Bulbs, February, September, October on 1st February 2019

The Greek myth

We get the word 'Narcissus' from Greek mythology. A nymph called Echo fell in love with a young Greek named Narcissus, but Narcissus told her to leave him alone. Heartbroken, she lived alone until nothing but an echo of her remained. Nemesis, the God of revenge, heard the story and lured Narcissus to a pool. Narcissus, who was very handsome and quite taken with himself, saw his reflection in the pool and, as he leaned over to see better, fell in and drowned. He turned into the flower.

European heritage

[Narcissus](#) species are found in a variety of habitats in Europe and North Africa, ranging from sea level to subalpine meadows, woodlands and rocky places. Spain hosts the greatest variety of species, but they can also be found in Morocco, Portugal, western France, Italy, and other countries.

Daffodils were introduced into gardens in about 300BC. The Greek botanist and philosopher Theophrastus listed and described many of the earliest known kinds of narcissus in his nine-volume 'Enquiry into Plants'. Daffodils were brought to Britain by the Romans who thought that the sap from daffodils had healing powers. Actually the sap contains crystals that can irritate the skin.

Classification and breeding in the 19th century

It was not until the 19th century that classification of the many narcissus species was attempted. Although the name 'daffodil' is often applied only to the larger trumpet-flowered cultivars, with the short-cupped and multi-headed cultivars referred to as narcissi, breeders and other enthusiasts refer to all kinds as daffodils.

Due to their popularity as cultivated plants, thousands of cultivars have been bred. The perianths (petals) are mostly yellow or white, but can occasionally be orange, green, or red or a combination of these colours. Today, many cultivars have brightly coloured coronas (cups) which may be yellow, white, pink, orange, red, green or a combination of these.

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