

Garden notes

1 Mulching in spring: apply a layer 2-3 inches thick of wood, bark or spent garden compost, or even mushroom compost if you can get it.

1. Suppresses weeds
2. Keeps in moisture
3. Rots down and improve soil structure/composition

Mushroom compost is essentially manure and lime, thus it has a strong alkalinity which breaks down clay soils (but is no good for acid loving plants like Rhododendrons or Camellias etc.



2 Plants that epitomise a month like March are Narcissus (commonly known as daffodils)



Some brief history

Native to Western Europe, it's been grown by us as decorative garden plants for around for 250 years; daffodils were used as sign to let us know its spring.

During the 1950s, trains were organised called **Daffodil Specials**, to carry people out from the city to the countryside, in Gloucestershire and Herefordshire - the golden triangle where people could feast their eyes on these beautiful flowers.

Although the trains are now gone, commercial growers are still producing millions of daffodils every year as cut flowers for sale. Daffodils' are the county plant of Gloucestershire and the national plant of Wales.

The daffodil or Narcissus belongs to the **Amaryllidaceae** family, also containing Snowdrops, Alliums and Agapanthus. It is a single bulbous perennial with a single stem, mostly with one flower at the top (although there are a few multi-head varieties).



Snow drops



Alliums



Agapanthus

Anatomy

The outside petals or perianth are made from three sepals and 2 petals. Inside the corona or trumpet is where all the action takes place.

In the centre is the Stigma, the female bit which received the pollen. The Stamens are arranged around its edge (their tops are anthers full of pollen). The back of the plant is the ovary which when the plant has been pollinated, swells and is full of seeds.

Narcissus is easy to grow. They can be planted as dry bulbs during the Autumn- they will grow in most soil types, in shade or in the full sun. Once they have flowered, they need to be dead headed or simply cut the whole flower stem off, but not the surrounding leaves which must continue to photosynthesise to turn light into food energy, sending it back into the bulb, which then helps to produce flowers for the next spring.



Increasing stock

To increase your stock, you need to dig up whole clumps, divide them, and replant them in smaller groups straight away 4"-6" deep.

Demonstration

Narcissus is a fascinating organism- they have everything they need within them to produce roots, leaves and flowers.

Dissecting the bulb shows it is a tunicate bulb, having layer after layer like the onion. Each layer produces a leaf or a part of the flower in the centre, or part of the outside skin.

Some common favourites are:

- a) *Narcissus bulbocodium* (Hooped petticoat daffodil). This grows mainly in acid soils and contains more seeds than any other daffodil more seeds equal more bulbs).
- b) *Narcissus 'Baths Flame'* this is heritage variety that dates back before WW1 and is favourite in the Cornish cut flower trade.
- c) *Narcissus pseudonarcissus* (**Lent Lily**) is Britain's own wild daffodil.

Pruning Hazels Now

Corylus maximum purpurea

Corylus avellana

These need to be pruned off now since many are or will be shading out other plants.

Coppicing *Corylus*, *Cornus* and *Salix* (and other shrubs) respond well to this and is commonly used to stimulate new growth and clear areas where other woodland flowers can thrive out of the shade.

If cutting by hand, cut at an angle just above the ground (6-9inches); start with all large stems that can be taken safely down. Look for DDD, and crossing over branches. The idea is to leave around 8 new stems which will regrow within 2/3 years. This job is done ideally between Xmas and Easter, but nearer to the New Year is best practice.



Before Pruning



After Pruning



Dahlias

Introduced into Europe in the 16 Century from Mexico. They have been commonly cultivated for over 200 years in Europe and are regarded as fantastic border plants, flowering from April to November. Over the last 50 years they have undergone a big transition from mainly being used in allotments to mainstream border plants. Their huge diversity stems from many colours, shapes in many varieties. There are small ones that can be planted at the front and larger ones used as structural, colourful back drop to borders.



Bishop of Llandaff (RHS choice) is our current favourite.

They should be lifted out of the ground in Autumn for safe keeping (are not frost resistant), checked to see if the tubers are strong, firm and not damaged and potted up in old compost for the winter.

In March check to see if tubers are still firm and in good condition, then pot up using new compost and grit, in large plastic pots to develop roots, never let them dry out. When they are 1ft high, they can then go out. When planting out make sure there is still plenty of grip in the new hole they are going to be put into.

Jobs for the week

1 Prune roses: DDD and crossing branches rubbing together. Cut out weak spindly branches. Reduce all branches by, between $\frac{1}{4}$ to a $\frac{1}{3}$, leaving no less than 3 buds.

2 SOW peas now in double or triple rows.

3 Prune or comb ornamental grasses: Deciduous grasses like Miscanthus cut to the ground. Evergreen grasses like Stipa should just combed through to remove dead material. This brown material can be composted with green materials.