

## THE STORIES IN A POET'S DAFFODIL

*Narcissus poeticus* (Poet's Daffodil, Nargis, Pheasant's Eye, Findern Flower, and Pinkster Lily) was one of the first daffodils to be cultivated, and is frequently identified as the narcissus of ancient times—often associated with the Greek legend of Narcissus.



*Poet's daffodil is native and prominent in the meadows of Poiana Brasov, a part of the Transylvanian region in Romania.*

Extremely fragrant, with a ring of petals in pure white and a short corona of light yellow with a distinct reddish edge, Poet's Daffodil grows to 20 to 40 cm (7.9 to 15.7 in) tall and is widely naturalized in North America and Europe.

Poet's Daffodil is cultivated in the Netherlands and southern France for its essential oil, narcissus oil, one of the most popular fragrances used in perfumes. Narcissus oil is used as a principal ingredient in 11% of modern quality perfumes—including 'Fatale' and 'Samsara'—as a floral concrete or absolute. The oil's fragrance resembles a combination of jasmine and hyacinth.

The earliest mention of Poet's Daffodil is likely in the botanical writings of Theophrastus

(371 – c. 287 BCE), who wrote about a spring-blooming narcissus that the Loeb Classical Library editors identify as *Narcissus poeticus*.

The poet Virgil, in his fifth Eclogue, also wrote about a narcissus whose description corresponds with that of *Narcissus poeticus*. In one version of the myth about the Greek hero Narcissus, he was punished by the Goddess of vengeance, Nemesis, who turned him into a Narcissus flower.

The fragrant *Narcissus poeticus* has also been recognized as the flower that Persephone and her companions were gathering when Hades abducted her into the Underworld, according to Hellmut Baumann in *The Greek Plant World in Myth, Art, and Literature*. This myth accounts for the custom, which has lasted into modern times, of decorating graves with these flowers.

Linnaeus, who gave the flower its name, quite possibly did so because he believed it was the one that inspired the tale of Narcissus, handed down by poets since ancient times.

While all narcissi are poisonous when eaten, Poet's Daffodil is more dangerous than others, acting as a strong emetic and irritant. The scent is powerful enough that it can cause headache and vomiting if a large quantity is kept in a closed room.

JOURNAL PROMPT: Poet Edna St. Vincent Millay credits the poet's daffodil with bringing poetry to her childhood days. Write a poem or a letter adopting Edna's childhood perspective where she explains why the daffodils covering her front yard exposed or elicited poetry. Consider using the sonnet form for your poem, since this was one of the poetic forms in which Millay excelled.