

Daffodil Plantings in Amherst

To celebrate the 250th anniversary of Amherst, one of the planning committee members, Dolly Jolly, proposed planting thousands of daffodil bulbs. She contacted the Garden Club of Amherst for support, and Denise Gagnon, a garden club member, began working with Dolly to design the daffodil plantings for the May 2009 celebration of Community Week. Ten thousand daffodil bulbs were planted in the parks and in the town commons, and an additional 11,000 bulbs were planted in neighborhoods, at schools and businesses, and by individual homeowners in Amherst.

Working with Diane Klenotic at the Hadley Garden Center, we selected 3 daffodil varieties:

Camelot – a classic large yellow cup variety

Goblet – a bicolor trumpet with white petals and a yellow center

Thalia – a fragrant daffodil with multiple white stems

These varieties were selected because they bloom a bit later than most varieties and would be at their peak for the Community Week celebration. If we have a particularly cold spring, the daffodils are apt to come up later, and if we have a particularly warm spring, they may bloom earlier. The temperatures were perfect for the May 2009 celebration and the daffodils provided a lovely show of bloom for the celebration.

Landscapers and individuals volunteered their time and energy to plant the daffodils to help celebrate Amherst's 250th anniversary. Since then, with the support of the Business Improvement District (BID), and the Garden Club of Amherst, Dolly Jolly and Denise Gagnon have continued to plant bulbs in Amherst. Every year approximately 3,500 additional bulbs have been planted and two new varieties have been added to some of the plantings:

Actea – the poet's daffodil, has white petals and a yellow cup edged in red, and was planted at the Dickinson Homestead and other locations

Ice Follies – blooms slightly earlier, and has white petals and a yellow cup that fades to creamy white

Amherst residents and visitors have truly enjoyed the daffodil plantings. Since 2009, close to 50,000 bulbs have been planted and there are more areas that have been designated for daffodil plantings.

Unlike tulips, chipmunks, squirrels and deer, do not eat daffodil bulbs. It's also the case that unlike tulips, daffodils will multiply.

For the 250th anniversary plantings, we planted the daffodils in large drifts. We mixed the original three bulb varieties and planted drifts of between 200 and 400 bulbs. If you want a good show of daffodils, and you have an area where 50 bulbs can be planted, you should plant one variety, otherwise the daffodils will not provide as much of an impact as you might like.

When planting daffodils you should plant them:

In the fall, by the end of October

Plant approximately 200 bulbs per 50 square feet.

If the soil is compacted, you can prepare it by using a rototiller or by digging up the area and then adding compost and/or planting mix.

Try not to plant in rigid rows, but instead plant in drifts with curves, similar to kidney shapes.

Plant the bulbs twice as deep as their height, with the flat side on the bottom.

Plant each bulb approximately 6 inches apart.

In fields and in areas with compacted soil, we used a power auger as an attachment on a power drill to plant the bulbs. For field plantings, you can toss them and plant them where they land for a more natural look.

Daffodils should be fertilized in the spring, and you need to wait until the leaves of the daffodils turn yellow before you cut them back. As the leaves turn yellow, they replace nutrients back into the bulbs for future bloom.

The daffodils were planted on edges of areas or near trees, so that they could be mowed around more easily and the leaves could be left to turn yellow.

After the daffodil plantings for the 250th anniversary was such a success, we were hoping some events could be planned around the daffodil plantings. That's when Big Brothers Big Sisters of Hampshire County planned a fund raising event around the daffodils. The 6th Daffodil Fun Run was held during the last weekend in April. It starts at Kendrick Park, where thousands of daffodils have been planted, and travels past different daffodil plantings near the center of town.

The daffodil plantings in Amherst continue to be a welcome sight every spring and we look forward to planting more daffodil bulbs and more events surrounding the daffodils.