

Tale from the Garden!

When it seems like winter will never lose its icy grip, the dainty **crocus** pushes through the snow to put on a show of colourful revival. If you're passing the home of Harry & Margaret just take a look at their front garden – fab-u-lous!

Crocus flowers lead the way for other spring bloomers to follow. They bloom bright and early, bringing much needed colour after a long winter. These small-but-mighty plants with their colourful blooms and sweet fragrance lure hungry bees out of their hives in February & March. From snow crocuses (the first to bloom) to giant Dutch crocuses, all just 2 to 4 inches tall, these blooms offer a variety in colour (pinks, reds, oranges, yellows, purples, blues, and more) that stand out against the bleak late-winter landscape. Both spring-flowering types belong to the Iris family (Iridaceae), as does the Autumn-flowering saffron crocus (*Crocus sativus*) that the spice saffron is harvested from. Crocus bulbs (technically called “corms”) not only provide winter garden colour, but they naturalize, meaning that they spread and come back year after year - with minimum care - for an ever-larger display. As a bonus, deer, squirrels & rabbits rarely bother early little crocus corms.



The name of the plant is derived from “**krokos**”, an ancient **Greek name for saffron** (*Crocus sativus*). *Crocus sativus*, commonly known as Saffron Crocus, is the most important species of the genus. It has three stigmas and parts of it are often dried and used as a spice and a colouring agent. It's worth mentioning that the spice saffron is the most expensive spice in the world, mainly because it's hand-harvested and requires a lot of manual work.

Crocus is connected with a range of myths and legends that mostly come from Ancient Greece.

The best known Greek legend about the Crocus is the **story of Crocus and Smilax**.

According to legend, Crocus was a young man who fell in love with a nymph called Smilax. The gods were so pleased with his love and devotion that they granted him immortality and turned him into the plant of the same name. Similarly, Smilax is believed to have been given a similar fate and turned into bindweed so that the two lovers could be together forever. Another version of the myth says that he was unhappy with his affair. Infuriated by his arrogance, the gods punished him transforming Crocus into a flower.

This myth has numerous forms, but mainly includes unfulfilled and tragic love of a man who is turned into a flower. It is a sentimental story of a young man's youth and unfulfilled love.

Another legend states that Crocus was a young man who was a companion of the god Hermes. One day, **Crocus and Hermes** were playing a game of discus and Hermes accidentally hit and killed his friend. Hermes was so distraught that he turned the mortal Crocus's body into a flower. The first Crocus grew at the spot where he died, symbolizing rebirth and renewal of the body and spirit.

Crocus is even associated with **Valentine's day**. It's a bit late now, Valentine's day having come & gone, but it's still interesting to know that Valentine's Day honours Saint Valentine, a Roman physician and Christian martyr who was jailed and sentenced to death for practicing Christianity. St. Valentine is believed to have been a priest during the third century in Rome, when Christianity was not welcome in Roman society. It was a time when Christians were mistreated for their faith and horribly persecuted. Valentine had the reputation of healing the sick and praying for his patients. When he was caught

marrying couples, he was arrested and dragged before the Prefect of Rome, who condemned him to death. During his imprisonment, Valentine befriended a jailer Astorius who respected his wisdom. He discovered that the jailer's daughter, Julia, was blind and the only world she knew was through the eyes of her father. Valentine was executed on February 14, 269 AD. On the day of his execution, he sent Julia a hand-written letter wrapped with a yellow Crocus, one of his healing plants. He signed it: "from your Valentine", which is where this holiday then got its name. When she opened the letter, she discovered a yellow Crocus inside and her eyesight was miraculously restored. Suddenly, she experienced the feelings of joy and pleasure. Therefore, the Crocus is often referred to as St. Valentine's flower and is associated with cheerfulness, pleasure, gladness and joy.

White croci usually represented truth, innocence and purity. The purple variety imply success, pride and dignity. The yellow type is joy.

First of all, it symbolizes **youth** and **innocence**. It takes us to the days of our childhood when we had no care or the tedious responsibilities of adulthood to weigh us down. Those were the days when everything seemed to be simple, beautiful and magical.

The Crocus symbolizes **rebirth** and a never-ending cycle of life. It signifies the arrival of spring, the promise of new beginnings and exciting new events. Crocuses are one of the first flowers to emerge after winter and have been known to bloom surrounded by snow. The flowering season depends on the variety and growing conditions. Generally, Crocuses will bloom again the following year if the conditions are favourable.

The flower also represents **cheerfulness, pleasure, gladness** and **joy**. This flower symbolizes cheerfulness due to the bright and vivid colours, and is therefore often used to add colour to bouquets. Crocuses bring pleasure through the charm of their visual appearance. Their beauty attracts us and we enjoy looking at them again and again. They also signify gladness and joy and are often associated with thoughts of beauty.

"And all the woods are alive with the murmur and sound of Spring,
And the rose-bud breaks into pink on the climbing briar,
And the crocus-bed is a quivering moon of fire
Girdled round with the belt of an amethyst ring."
(Oscar Wilde)

"The crocus of hope is poking through the frost," said Prime Minister Boris Johnson in an address to the nation on the gradual easing of the national lockdown.

On Monday 22nd February Boris Johnson announced all Covid restrictions could be lifted by 21 June under the Prime Minister's roadmap for exiting lockdown.

"Spring is on its way both literally and metaphorically – but I won't be buccaneering with other people's lives," Johnson added, making reference to not unlocking England sooner.

Where's your crocus?

The downtrodden people of Israel and Judah found fresh hope in the prophet Isaiah's vision of their beautiful restoration by God. Amid all the doom and judgment Isaiah foretold, this bright promise took root: "The desert and the parched land will be glad; the wilderness will rejoice and blossom. Like the crocus, it will burst into bloom; it will rejoice greatly and shout for joy" (Isaiah 35 v1-2)

No matter our situation today, we too can rejoice in the beautiful ways our heavenly Father restores us with fresh hope, including through His creation. When we feel down, reflecting on His glory and splendour will bolster us. "Strengthen the feeble hands, steady the knees that give way," Isaiah encouraged (v3).

We find the crocuses, the signs of hope, it would seem, where we least expect: under icy snow, when the world is cold, in the bleak desert, when we are tapped out, worn out, discouraged. When we are trapped like John, in Herod's prison, where there is no reason, no good reason for anything like hope, when we are devoid of delight and way beyond surprise.

Can a few flowers rekindle our hope? A prophet said yes. Boris said yes. So does our hope-giving God.