

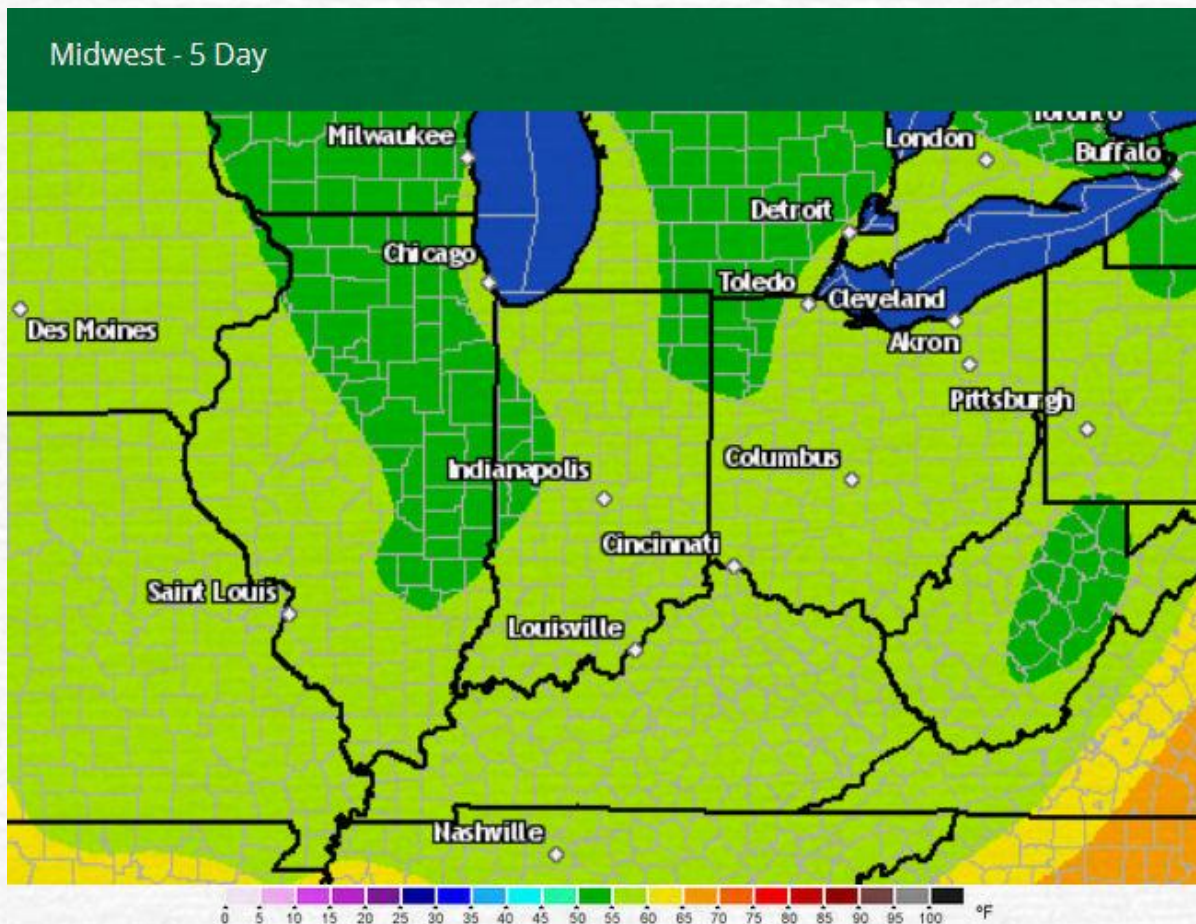
When Is It Time to Plant Daffodils?

~ by Suzy Wert & Jim Wilson

Daffodil planting time is determined, not by the calendar, but by soil temperatures. There is a handy map of soil temperatures found here:

<http://greencastonline.com/tools/SoilTempMaps.aspx> You can use the drop down menu on the right hand side to select a map – we are on the Midwest map.

No matter where you live, Kentucky or Zionsville, it's an okay time to start planting when your area of the map is yellow-green, and is forecasted to be yellow-green for 5 days. A 5-day map of this is also provided on the website. We are looking at a combination of the temperature required to root bulbs, and also the temperature required to make the fungus spores in the soil go dormant.



Start planting your Div. 9 poets, the closely related Div 3s short cups, and Div 8 *tazettas* which all have a higher tolerance to basal rot, first. Also first should be your Div 6 *cyclamineus* and miniatures, which are thin-skinned bulbs and have a tendency to dry out if not planted in a timely fashion. End your planting with white trumpets & white short cups, reverse bicolors, and Div 5s *triandrus*, all things that have a tendency to rot. This is because the spores of *Fusarium oxysporum f. sp. Narcissi*, which cause basal rot, are dormant at a temperature of about 54 degrees.

The way basal rot usually enters a healthy bulb is through a mechanical cut (avoidable, don't plant anything that is not callused over – think of it as a protective scab) or the open wounds created when the individual roots come out of the basal plate in the normal course of rooting (unavoidable, the bulbs must root!). The tiny IDS growouts should be planted neither early nor late, but somewhere in the middle, since they are planted more shallowly (where it's warmer) yet are also small and more likely to dry out.

For those wondering about the science behind the map, the data is from the U.S. Geologic Survey which hosts many daily water and soil sample tests across the state and around the country. The instruments they use measure temperature and moisture for the entire column of soil from the surface down to a depth of either 15cm (about 6 inches) or 30cm (about 11.8 inches), respectively. The values you see are an average for the entire layer relative to the length of the instrument described. This means the soil temperatures for our purposes, e.g. daffodil rooting at 15cm down, are always lower than the map indicates, since we are able to ignore the top couple of inches in the average which includes the higher surface temperatures.

If you want a measurement of your very own little space, simply buy your own little soil temperature thermometer, Jim has a couple of these, and reports that the 4" stem needs to be in a bit of a hole for an accurate reading at a 6" depth, and that if he were to buy a new one, he would look at the [Vee Gee Scientific 6" Dial Soil Thermometer](#) from Amazon. The immediate surroundings do seem to affect the readings by a few degrees.

If it's all too much trouble, just wait until late Sept-October when the nights are consistently forecasted to be in the 50s or lower, and you'll be fine. ☺ You can use www.accuweather.com for a long-term forecast if necessary.

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