

A botanical companion to The Wild Iris

I have collected images of and some basic information about all the plants mentioned in Louise Glück's book *The Wild Iris* (please [tell me](#) if I'm missing any). This project is meant as a reference for the curious and -- like me -- botanically ignorant reader of this wonderful book.

Practical notes: There is a navigation bar at the top of each page. Hover over italicized words in "Type" section to see the definition from the glossary. Hover over the number(s) in the "References" section to see the reference.

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Introduction

I first read the Wild Iris in 2017 on the recommendation of my friend J, which began an ongoing love of Louise Glück's work. When I first read the book, I felt a vague lack: While I could still understand and feel the beauty of the flowers and plants that are woven into the story, my imagination of them was not very precise. I could not quite remember what clematis was and what chicory was -- or what a daffodil was relative to a daisy (both of these are mistakes I made as recently as a year ago). While this feeling of lack did push me to try to learn more about the relevant plants, I did not take on this project in any more systematic fashion at that time.

In 2020, I reread the Wild Iris in full (I had returned to parts of it previously) as part of a book club with my partner C. C and her friend M had just completed their zine, Burnout, on academic travel. In the conjunction of these two things -- feeling again my lack of knowledge and seeing a zine happen in real time -- the idea for this botanical companion to the Wild Iris was born.

The intended purpose of this zine (I use the term even though it only exists as a collection of webpages at present) is to serve as a companion to readers of the Wild Iris that do not have extensive knowledge of the plants discussed in the text. The zine provides an image of and some basic

information about every plant that is mentioned in the book, organized in the same sequence that they appear in the poems and duplicated where there are references to the same plant across multiple poems. I have worked to find images that show the plant in at least some context, though I have not always been successful. The information that I have chosen to present alongside the image is relatively sparse, and chosen to reflect some of the knowledge that a gardener might use in growing the plants. I have not offered any kind of linking interpretation between the characteristics of the plants and their function in the poems. This is left to the reader.

I want to thank J, E, C, and many others for advice and encouragement throughout this project.

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Iris

The Wild Iris (page 1): "At the end of my suffering / there was a door."

Family: Iridaceae

Type: Herbaceous, deciduous or evergreen
perennial bulb or rhizome

Blooming period: Spring to early Summer

Sun requirement: Full

Soil requirement: Rich, well-drained, slightly alkaline.

Notes: There are a multitude of wild-growing and cultivated irises, in numerous colors. Iris flowers typically have three large "falls" (downturned petals) and three smaller "standards" (upturned petals).

Sources: [1]



Pine

The Wild Iris (page 1): "Overhead, noises, branches of the pine shifting."

Family: Pinaceae

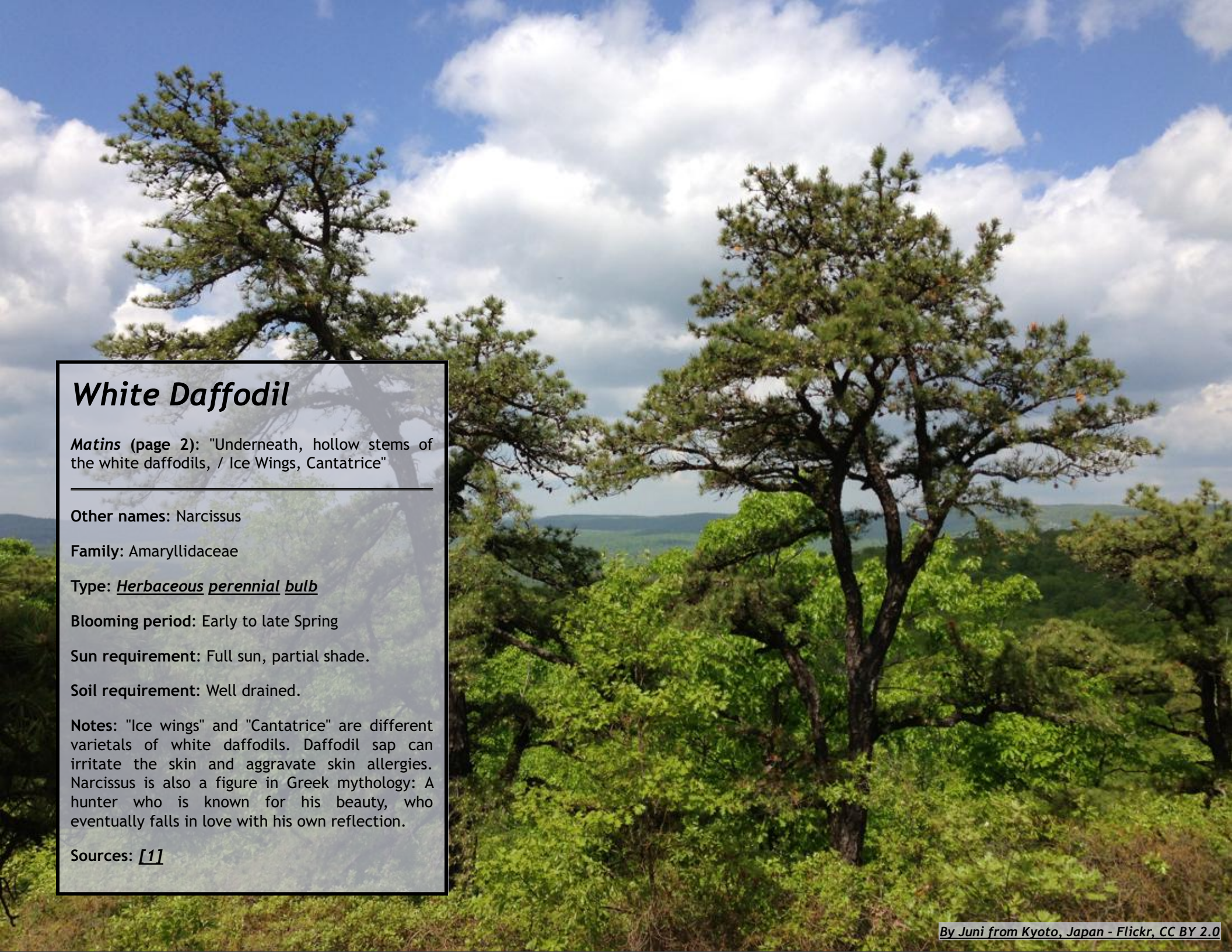
Type: Coniferous, *evergreen tree*

Sun requirement: Full sun

Soil requirement: Acidic, mostly well-drained

Notes: The cones produced by pines can ripen over multiple years, from green to brown. The pinaceae family includes pines, firs, cedars, hemlocks, larches, and spruces.

Sources: [1], [2]



White Daffodil

Matins (page 2): "Underneath, hollow stems of the white daffodils, / Ice Wings, Cantatrice"

Other names: Narcissus

Family: Amaryllidaceae

Type: Herbaceous perennial bulb

Blooming period: Early to late Spring

Sun requirement: Full sun, partial shade.

Soil requirement: Well drained.

Notes: "Ice wings" and "Cantatrice" are different varieties of white daffodils. Daffodil sap can irritate the skin and aggravate skin allergies. Narcissus is also a figure in Greek mythology: A hunter who is known for his beauty, who eventually falls in love with his own reflection.

Sources: [1]



Wild Violets

Matins (page 2): "dark / leaves of the wild violet."

Family: Violaceae

Type: Herbaceous semievergreen perennial.

Blooming period: late Winter to early Spring

Sun requirement: Sun or partial shade.

Soil requirement: Rock gardens, screes, and alpine houses. Moist, well-drained soil.

see also: violets

Notes: The flowers are violet or white.

Sources: [\[1\]](#)



Birch

Matins (page 2): "by the mailbox, leaves / of the divided birch tree folded, pleated like fins."

Family: Betulaceae

Type: Deciduous tree

Sun requirement: Sun

Soil requirement: Moist, well-drained

Notes: Birch have white bark that peels almost like paper, and which is often used as fire starter and was used in canoe construction; The leaves have notable fall color.

Sources: [1]



Trillium

Trillium (page 4): "When I woke up I was in a forest. The dark / seemed natural, the sky through the pine trees / thick with many lights."

Family: Melanthiaceae

Type: Herbaceous perennial

Blooming period: early to late Spring

Sun requirement: Partial shade

Soil requirement: Fertile, moist but well-drained, neutral to slightly acidic.

Notes: Trillium have petals, sepals, and leaves that occur in whorls of three. They tend to grow in the forest.

Sources: [1]



Pine

Trillium (page 4): "The dark / seemed natural,
the sky through the pine trees / thick with many
lights."

Family: Pinaceae

Type: Coniferous, evergreen tree

Sun requirement: Full sun

Soil requirement: Acidic, mostly well-drained

Notes: The cones produced by pines can ripen over multiple years, from green to brown. The pinaceae family includes pines, firs, cedars, hemlocks, larches, and spruces.

Sources: [\[1\]](#), [\[2\]](#)



Fir

Trillium (page 4): "And as I watched, all the lights of heaven / faded to make a single thing, a fire / burning through the cool firs."

Family: Pinaceae

Type: Coniferous, evergreen tree

Sun requirement: Full or partial sun

Soil requirement: Moist, well-drained

Notes: The pinaceae family includes pines, firs, cedars, hemlocks, larches, and spruces.

Sources: [1], [3]



Lamium

Lamium (page 5): "This is how you live when you have a cold heart."

Other names: Dead nettles

Family: Lamiaceae

Type: Herbaceous mostly semi-evergreen annual or perennial

Blooming period: Spring to Summer

Sun requirement: Full or partial shade

Soil requirement: Moist but well-drained.

Notes: The leaves of some varieties of lamium have their interiors marked with silver. Sometimes considered a weed; sometimes used for groundcover.

Sources: [1]



Maple

Lamium (page 5): "As I do: in shadows, trailing over cool rock, under the great maple trees."

Family: Sapindaceae

Type: Deciduous, evergreen tree

Blooming period: late Spring

Sun requirement: Sun, partial shade

Soil requirement: Fertile, moist, well-drained

Notes: Many maples have notable fall color.

Sources: [1]

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Glossary

annual - A plant that completes its life cycle in one growing season

biennial - A plant that flowers, seeds, and dies in the second season after germination and produces only stems, roots, and leaves in the first season.

perennial - A plant that lives for at least three seasons -- woody perennials leave woody stems at their base outside the growing season, while herbaceous perennials leave nothing above ground.

herbaceous - A plant with no persistent woody stems above ground (this includes most perennials and almost all annuals and biennials)

woody - A plant with persistent woody stems above ground, with subcategories including trees, shrubs, and lianas.

tree - A perennial woody plant with an elongated trunk or stem.

shrub - A small to medium-sized perennial woody plant. Smaller shrubs are termed subshrubs. Shrubs with all of their woody stems lying on or close to the ground are termed prostrate shrubs.

deciduous - A plant that loses its leaves annually at the end of the growing season. Plants that lose only some of their leaves are referred to as semi-deciduous (somewhat interchangeable with semi-evergreen).

evergreen - A plant that retains its leaves at the end of the growing season, and loses some leaves regularly throughout the year. Plants that lose only some of their leaves are referred to as semi-evergreen (somewhat interchangeable with semi-deciduous).

bulb - A food storage organ, usually underground, that is used to sustain the plant through its dormant period (there are many variations on bulbs observed botanically, we have followed the horticultural convention and elided these distinctions). A plant with a bulb is often referred to simply as a bulb.

vine - A plant that tends to grow using stems, lianas, or runners that climb other nearby plants or structures.

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