



**GET  
INVOLVED  
TODAY!**

# **Creating Natural Connections Simply Snowdrops**



## Wild ways well

Setting out to find snowdrops is a great way to work some wild ways into your week, at a time of year when it can be hard to get yourself outdoors.

Find a woodland near you and **Be Active**—go for a walk around sunny woodland spots in January and February and look for the first flowers of Spring.

The Woodland Trust's Nature's Calendar website asks people to record the first snowdrop they see each year.

<https://naturescalendar.woodlandtrust.org.uk/what-we-record-and-why/species-we-record/flowers/snowdrop/>


By returning your sightings to the Nature's Calendar website you're **Giving** something back and helping to preserve our woodlands. Why not take a camera and take some photographs of what you find? Share your photos with people you know or post them online for the world to enjoy. You can always share them with the Cumbernauld Living Landscape Facebook or Twitter page.

Take some time to experience the flowers with all your senses, Stop and breathe deeply, **Connect** with the woodland and with the new life all around you. Close your eyes and tune your other senses in to the Spring. Listen to the birds sing, feel the sun, wind or rain on your skin, feel the earth beneath your feet. You are part of this wider world and you hold the power to preserve and protect it in your hands.

**Take Notice** of the flowers, look at them closely, examine the petals, look for the telltale green markings on the white flowers which allow you to tell varieties apart. Have you found wild snowdrops or cultivar species? You can find guides online to show the difference.

There is always more to **Learn** when studying nature. Can you see a link between where the snowdrops grow and the woodland surrounding them? What sort of trees are around, how thick is the canopy? When the trees change does it affect the plants below? Why do you think this is? Are there any insects visiting the flowers?

Why not head out today and find some snowdrops in your local area?



A pale and pining girl, head  
bowed, heart gnawed,  
whose figure nods and  
shivers in a shawl  
of fine white wool, has  
suddenly appeared  
in the damp woods, as mild  
and mute as snowfall.

She may not last, She has no  
strength at all,  
but stoops and shakes as if  
she'd stood all night  
on one bare foot, confiding  
with the moonlight.

*Alice Oswald*

# snowdrops in Scotland

Although we are used to seeing them in our parks and gardens, snowdrops are not native to Scotland or the UK.

They were introduced some time in the 16th century, probably by monks who planted them around their monasteries to be used in ceremonies at Candlemass—when they were associated with the Virgin Mary.

The commonest form of the snowdrop in the UK has one small white flower carried on a slender stalk, usually with two narrow green leaves. The flower has three outer segments and three inner. The outer are snow white all over, the inner have an upturned u shaped green mark on the outside and green and white stripes on the inside. They were first officially recorded in the UK by the botanist **John Gerard** who wrote about them in his book the “**Great Herbal**” in 1597

*“The first of these bulbous violets rises forth of the ground with two small leaves, flat and crested, of an overworne green colour: among the which rises up a small and tender stalk, of two hand high;*

*At the top whereof cometh forth of a skinnie hood a small white flower of the bigness of a violet, compact of six leaves, three bigger and three lesser, tipped at the points with a light green. The smaller leaves are not so white as the outermost great leaves, but tipped with green as the others be.*

*The whole flower hangeth down his head by reason on the weak foote stalk whereon it groweth.*

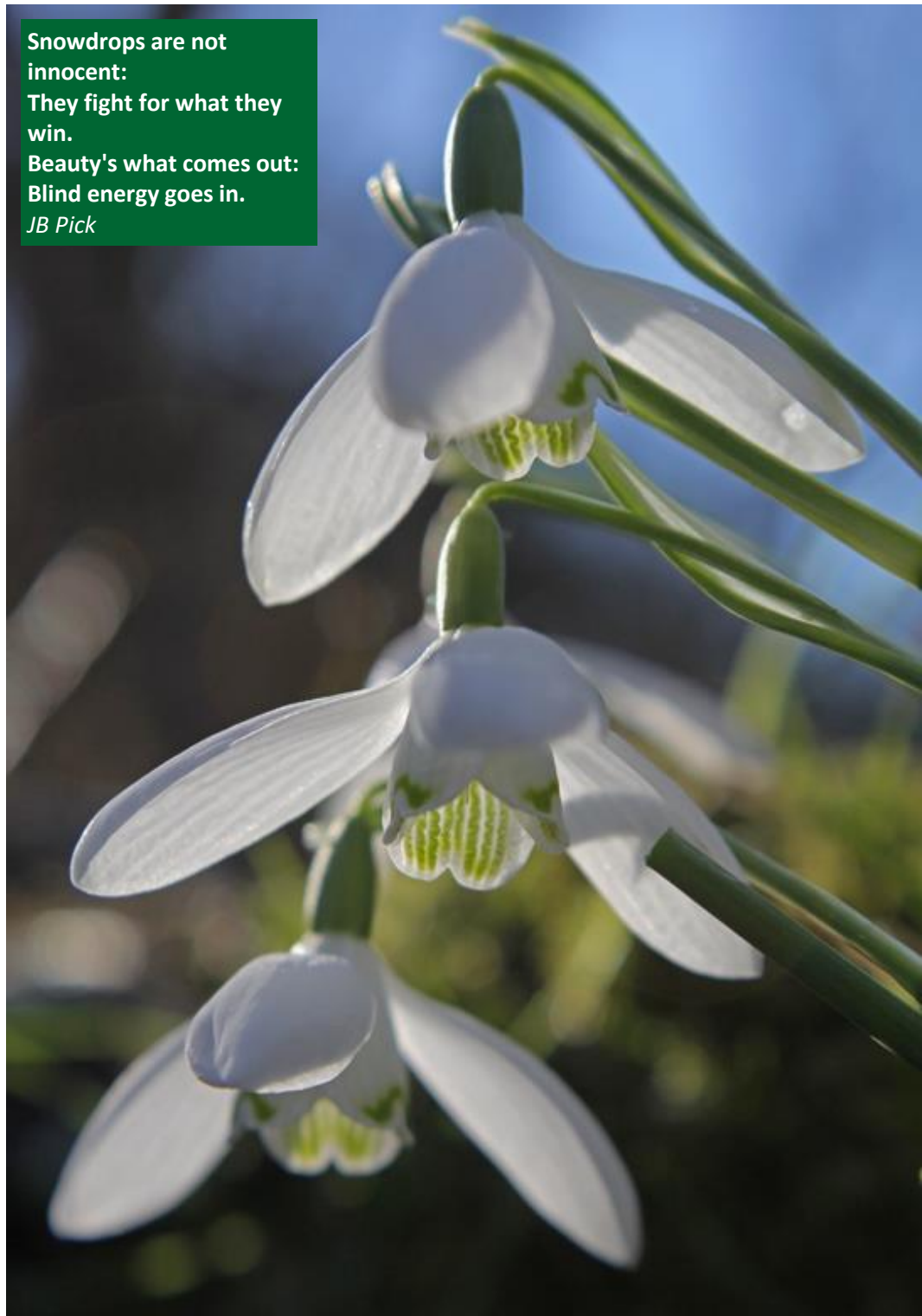
*They are maintained and cherished in gardens for the beauty and rareness of the flowers, and sweetness of their smell.”*

Although organisations like The Scottish Wildlife Trust often remove non-native species from their reserves snowdrops are usually left undisturbed. They have been here such a long time that they are now well established. They are also slow to spread, in the UK they can only really spread by bulb division, their seeds do not easily germinate here. They are not displacing any native plant as there is no native species which flowers so early—and they give a useful early nectar boost to pollinators like bees.

However they are not native so while they’re fine in your garden, they shouldn’t be planted on a nature reserve.

**Snowdrops are not  
innocent:  
They fight for what they  
win.  
Beauty's what comes out:  
Blind energy goes in.**

*JB Pick*



## what's in a name?

We might call them snowdrops in day to day use, but the scientific name for the most common variety in Britain is *Galanthus nivalis*.

‘**Gala**’ is Greek for milk, ‘**Anthus**’ means Flower and ‘**Nivalis**’ is Latin for ‘of the Snow.’

So all together the scientific name means “Milk Flower of the Snow”.

Other general names for snowdrops include

Snow Piercer

Dingle Dangles

Fair Maids of February

Candlemass Bells

Hope's Flower

Death's Flower

Little Sisters of the Snow

Mary's Tapers

There are loads of other local names—do you know any?

Our Victorian ancestors were fascinated with ‘floriography’ – the language of flowers. Each different type of flower had a meaning assigned to it and you could send messages to friends and loved ones by carefully composing a bouquet of flowers. In the language of flowers snowdrops represented hope, purity, rebirth, consolation or sympathy.



## Snowdrop Factoids

Snowdrops are thermogenic - they produce heat, giving them the ability to melt the snow around them as they grow.

They droop over to keep the pollen and nectar contained in the flower heads dry and safe from winter rain and snow.

In very cold weather they can close their flower head to protect the nectar further.

The green stripes act as a landing guide for bees!

Traditionally snowdrops were used to treat headaches but the bulbs are actually poisonous causing nausea and vomiting.

Galamantine, a chemical extracted from snowdrops, is used to treat Alzheimers. There is also research on its use as an anti HIV drug. Another compound found in snowdrops is a promising insect repellent.

Someone who enjoys snowdrops is known as a Galanthophile.

Snowdrops love damp, lightly shaded, wooded areas.

From the *Amaryllidacea* family, there are 20 wild varieties and more than 2500 cultivated types. New ones are being discovered all the time.

They are endangered, you need a special licence to trade them, this is because they are often dug up by unscrupulous flower sellers.

Unusual specimens can go for huge prices—one single bulb called 'Golden Fleece' was sold for £1,390. Some snowdrop woods have 24hour security guards.

They are native to Europe, Turkey, and the Middle East.

They are an indicator of climate change. In the 1950s they did not typically flower until late February, they are now regularly recorded flowering even before New Year's Day.

## snowdrops in myth and legend

Snowdrops are associated with many myths and legends across Europe -though not so many in Britain as they are not a native species.

The Victorians took snowdrop planting on the graves of loved ones to their hearts, and in many parts of the country, particularly in the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was considered very unlucky to bring the little flowers into the house from their cold environment - a single bloom being the worst omen of all.

There were some common country beliefs about snowdrops such as,  
*Snowdrops may not be brought indoors as they will make the cows' milk watery, affect the colour of the butter and cause chickens to lay fewer eggs.*  
*if a girl eats the first snowdrop she finds in the spring, she will not get tanned in the summer.*

Its role as a harbinger of spring gives strength to the snowdrop's claims to be the flower of Hope. The first sight of a snowdrop in the woods can be an exciting moment, a promise that no matter how cold the weather , or how dark the days are at the moment, Spring is on its way.

Snowdrops are also associated with optimism, confidence and courage for the same reasons. They are said to be useful to help us overcome the pains and grievances of the past and look towards the future.





In Christian religious tradition the snowdrop became the symbol of Hope when Eve was expelled from Eden. An angel saw her huddled amongst the snow and felt sorry for her, it caught some snowflakes in its hand, breathed on them and scattered them on the ground around her where they became snowdrops.

This association with religion is probably what first caused snowdrops to be planted in Scotland and even today finding a patch of snowdrops is often a clue that a religious building once existed nearby.

*"This is an earnest, Eve, to thee"*

*The glorious Angel said,*

*"That sun and Summer soon shall be;*

*...*

*And thus the snowdrop, like the bow*

*That spans the cloudy sky.*

*Becomes a symbol whence we know*

*That brighter days are nigh;*

*That circling seasons, in a race*

*That knows no lagging; lingering pace*

*Shall each the other nimbly chase,*

*Till Time's departing final day*

*Sweep snowdrops and the World away.*

*George Wilson*



The fact there aren't many existing stories about snowdrops doesn't stop us making up our own...

*"When the world was being made all the plants and animals that were new on the Earth were proud of their shapes and colours. The flowers especially loved to show off and would tilt their heads to the sun to get the best effect and would ask the winds and the rains to complement them on their beauty. The snowdrop was considered amongst the least of them because its colour was plain white and didn't have the radiance, vibrancy and brightness of the others. No one looked for it and no one cared for it.*

*Then came the first winter and the first snow fell and covered the land, this did not affect the flowers as the snow had no colour and so the flowers could still shine through it. The snow was jealous of this and wanted a colour to call its own and so it asked all the flowers in turn if they would share their colour.*

*All of the flowers were far too proud and vain to share however and they refused. The snow was sad and angry at this so it resolved to cover the world forever and soon all the flowers would die beneath it. This was when the snowdrop came forward however and offered to share its own colour with the snow in order to save the others.*

*The snow thought the colour white was beautiful and it was touched by the act of bravery and generosity from this little shunned flower who expected nothing in return. It accepted the offer from the snowdrop and so the snow became white and promised to withdraw from the land every summer and allow all the flowers to grow. But it also offered the snowdrop a special reward – it would be the only flower allowed to grow right in amongst in the snow itself. The snowdrop would no longer be un-noticed and unloved, now it would be beloved of all creatures as the first messenger of Spring, bringing the promise of light and life to the world."*

Do you know any other stories about snowdrops? Why not trying making up your own legend?

The snow-drop, winter's timid child,  
Awakes to life bedew'd with tears;  
And flings around its fragrance mild,  
And where no rival flowrets bloom,  
Amidst the bare and chilling gloom,  
A beauteous gem appears!

All weak and wan, with head inclin'd,  
Its parent breast, the drifted snow;  
It trembles while the ruthless wind  
Bends its slim form; the tempest lours,  
Its em'rald eye drops crystal show'rs  
On its cold bed below.

Poor flow'r! On thee the sunny beam  
No touch of genial warmth bestows;  
Except to thaw the icy stream  
Whose little current purls along,  
Thy fair and glossy charms among,  
And whelms thee as it flows.

The night-breeze tears thy silky dress,  
Which, deck'd with silv'ry lustre, shone;  
The morn returns, not thee to bless,  
The gaudy crocus flaunts its pride,  
And triumphs where its rival died,  
Unshelter'd and unknown!

No sunny beam shall gild thy grave,  
No bird of pity thee deplore;  
There shall no spreading branches wave,  
For Spring shall all her gems unfold,  
And revel 'midst her buds of gold,  
When thou art seen no more!

Where'er I find thee, gentle flow'r,  
Thou still art sweet, and dear to me!  
For I have known the cheerless hour,  
Have seen the sun-beams cold and pale,  
Have felt the chilling wint'ry gale,  
And wept, and shrunk like thee!

Mary Robinson



## write an acrostic poem

An acrostic poem is one where the first letter of each line spells a word – try writing an acrostic about snowdrops

S

N

O

W

D

R

O

P





### **February Snow**

The snowdrops pop their heads out of the ground  
The earth has thawed so they'll just look around  
Just when they think its safe  
Snow gets dumped on their face  
As winter sneaks back in without a sound

***Francine Roberts***

## sketch a snowdrop

Snowdrops are quite simple flowers, why not try sketching one? Find a picture online or go out and find one in the outdoors and really study its shape and form, then see what you can create.

# The Five Ways to Wellbeing



**BE ACTIVE** – Take part in health walks and practical outdoor activities. Explore your local paths, woods and greenspaces.

**CONNECT** – Meet new people. Connect with the people, the wildlife and the nature that's all around us.



**GIVE** – Your time to be in nature. Give something back by sharing experiences and undertaking conservation tasks.

**TAKE NOTICE** – Note the changing cycles of life. Use your senses. Listen to birds, smell the flowers, live in the moment.



**LEARN** – Identify plants and wildlife, try new crafts, learn new skills. Discover things about nature and about yourself.

## Spending time with nature improves wellbeing

Spending time outdoors, amongst nature, makes people feel better about their lives.

Wild Ways Well gets people suffering from, or at risk of, poor mental health out into the greenspaces of Cumbernauld.

Whilst out amongst the trees, parks and reserves participants get a chance to slow down, relax and enjoy being in the company of other people.

All sessions include a walk, a chance to safely socialise with other people over a hot drink (often round a fire) and opportunities to try a variety of environmental and conservation related activities designed to fit in with the internationally recognised Five Ways to Wellbeing mental health framework.

**You can find out more about all our projects by visiting our website**

**[www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)**

**Facebook - [Cumbernauld Living Landscape](#) or**

**Twitter and Instagram - [@WildCumbernauld](#)**

**Wild Ways Well** is our nature and wellbeing project which is free for anyone to join. Each session involves a short walk, a chance to relax and chat (if you want) over a hot drink and try some fun, creative activities. There's time to immerse yourself in nature while you learn more about wildlife and Cumbernauld. It's a great way to meet new people, explore nature, try new activities, relax and de-stress. Sessions take place regularly on weekdays and at evenings and weekends. You can come as an individual but we also offer bespoke sessions to groups. If you are an individual who would like to part, a group leader, or someone who would like to refer participants to the project you can find out more details by contacting:

**Paul Barclay at [p.barclay@tcv.org.uk](mailto:p.barclay@tcv.org.uk)**

**The Nature Ninjas** Are our practical conservation volunteer group.

This aim of this group is to improve habitats across Cumbernauld for nature. Our groups are great places to make friends, keep fit and see the outdoors. No prior experience is necessary.

Examples of activities coming up include tree planting, scything, hedge laying, pond cleaning and much more!

We also provide training for upskilling or just for enjoyment and building knowledge of nature and conservation.

If you would like to get involved, then please contact:

**David Walsh at [d.walsh@tcv.org.uk](mailto:d.walsh@tcv.org.uk)**

**Early Connections and Natural Connections** are our education/outdoor learning projects for Connecting Young People to Nature.

**Early Connections** workshops for ages 8-11 years links to habitats projects and the wildlife in our town.

**Natural Connections** encourages high school students aged 11-16 to connect with nature on a deeper level to aid employability skills.

We also offer Continual Professional Development **training** to enable teachers and leaders to confidently deliver outdoor learning for their young people.

For more information contact:

**Tracy Lambert at [tlambert@scottishwilldifetrust.org.uk](mailto:tlambert@scottishwilldifetrust.org.uk)**

# Links

## **Wild Ways Well**

[www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/project/wild-ways-well)

**The Conservation Volunteers** [www.tcv.org.uk/scotland](http://www.tcv.org.uk/scotland)

**The Scottish Wildlife Trust** [www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](http://www.scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)

## **The Five Ways to Wellbeing**

[www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/five-ways-to-mental-wellbeing)

## **Our Natural Health Service**

[www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service](http://www.nature.scot/professional-advice/contributing-healthier-scotland/our-natural-health-service)

## **NHS Mental Health**

[www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing](http://www.healthscotland.scot/health-topics/mental-health-and-wellbeing)

**SamH** [www.samh.org.uk](http://www.samh.org.uk)

**The Scottish Snowdrop Festival** [www.visitscotland.com/blog/Scotland/Snowdrop festival](http://www.visitscotland.com/blog/Scotland/Snowdrop-festival)

**John Muir Award** [www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award](http://www.johnmuirtrust.org/john-muir-award)

**iRecord** [www.brc.ac.uk/irecord](http://www.brc.ac.uk/irecord)

**iSpot** [www.ispotnature.org](http://www.ispotnature.org)

**NBN Atlas** [www.nbnatlas.org](http://www.nbnatlas.org)

**Zooniverse** [www.zooniverse.org](http://www.zooniverse.org)

**Volunteer Scotland** [www.volunteerscotland.net](http://www.volunteerscotland.net)

**Open University Open Learn** [www.open.edu/openlearn](http://www.open.edu/openlearn)

**FutureLearn** [www.futurelearn.com/courses](http://www.futurelearn.com/courses)

## **Woodland Trust Tree ID**

[www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/](http://www.woodlandtrust.org.uk/trees-woods-and-wildlife/british-trees/)

**RSPB Bird Song ID** [www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/bird-songs/what-bird-is-that](http://www.rspb.org.uk/birds-and-wildlife/bird-songs/what-bird-is-that)

**Indoor and outdoor activities** [www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/activities](http://www.cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk/activities)

**Element 19 ways to stay connected to nature**

[www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf](http://www.elament.org.uk/media/2229/19-ways-to-stay-connected-2.pdf)

**The Samaritans**—call them anytime on **116 123**

[www.samaritans.org/samaritans-in-scotland](http://www.samaritans.org/samaritans-in-scotland)

**Breathing Space**—call 0800 83 85 87

**Shout**—text 85258



**Cumbernauld Living Landscape** is a partnership between the Scottish Wildlife Trust, North Lanarkshire Council, Sanctuary Scotland, the James Hutton Institute and TCV – The Conservation Volunteers.

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**[cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk](http://cumbernauldlivinglandscape.org.uk)**

5-7 Napier Way, Wardpark North,  
Cumbernauld, G68 0EH

**T** 01236 617113

**E** [cumbernauldll@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk](mailto:cumbernauldll@scottishwildlifetrust.org.uk)

**f** CumbernauldLivingLandscape

**@WildCumbernauld**

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#### Partners



#### Funders



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