

WILDFLOWERS: UNIQUE WOMEN OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

In a world that's gone virtual, people have flocked to social media, where popularity is based on followers and likes. They seek attention and equate it with significance, but it's hard to find *true* significance. A face-to-face encounter may be sorely disappointing since people use filters to enhance their facial features. Curating your Facebook profile allows you to present the version of you excluding any flaws and idiosyncrasies that make you the real you. Twitter just invites trolls to pick you apart one piece at a time.

Dictionary.com defines *significant* as "important and deserving of attention." It's the "look at me" word. Ask any mother and they'll tell you this is what you'll hear often raising a child: "Mom, look at my mudpie." "Look, Mom, no hands." "Did you see my report card, Mom?" "Hey Mom, are you coming to my game?" If you gave me a nickel for every time my son, Nathan, said, "Look at me," I'd be driving a different car. My conclusion? Humans crave significance. I'm convinced God made us that way.

The truth is we all want to be loved and accepted just as we are. No-makeup days. Messy house days. Rotten attitude days. Sadly, we wear so many masks and we're afraid to let them down and risk rejection. For most that would be a devastating blow. Truth be told, it's why we started wearing them in the first place. Emotional wounds made them necessary. And at some point, we wonder who we were before the mask went on. Where did the happy-go-lucky girl go? Who replaced her with the Ice Queen?

We are all in search of significance and purpose—the reason we exist. I propose we go back to the garden of Eden, where the Creator made us on purpose and for a purpose. Firstly, God valued humans so deeply that He wanted them to be just like Himself: "Then God said, 'Let us make man in our image, after our likeness'" (Genesis 1:26, ESV). We are to be image bearers of the divine. What greater importance could there be? God created His children to love them deeply and to be like Him.



But God didn't stop there. He intended for you to become a temple of the divine, the very dwelling place of God. "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, whom you have from God? You are not your own, for you were bought with a price. So glorify God in your body" (1 Corinthians 6:19-20, ESV). You are not merely a reflection of God but the habitation for His Spirit. It's a fancy way of saying your body is a beautiful vessel to hold the Holy One. The size of your nose, the color of your hair, and the circumference of your waist doesn't make you more or less inhabitable by the Holy Spirit.

Besides creating humans, God is a gardener, too. "Now the LORD God had planted a garden in the east, in Eden; and there he put the man he had formed" (Genesis 2:8, NIV). Our first and native habitat was among nature filled with trees, shrubs, and flowers that God handpicked. Some were good for food and others for mere pleasure. Our heavenly Father placed us in paradise to enjoy its beauty. What I'm trying to say is that our significance can also be drawn from the place that God prepared for us. Nature nurtures our souls like nothing else can.

One day, that great and final day, we'll return to the garden. "Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, as clear as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb down the middle of the great street of the city. On each side of the river stood the tree of life, bearing twelve crops of fruit, yielding its fruit every month. And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be any curse" (Revelation 22:1-3, NIV). A garden bookends the Bible and that's where God intends for His children to live once again.

In between, you are God's garden. Jesus said, "I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener" (John 15:1, NIV). You may be thinking, *I see Jesus in this text and I see God the gardener, but where am I?* Let's read a few more verses to see where Jesus made the connection between you and Him. "I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing" (John 15:5, NIV). Previously, we saw that significance is drawn from who you are, God's creation. The garden teaches us that we also find significance from what we do. And what we are supposed to do is bear fruit. We have a reason for living and an important role to play—bearing fruit through the way we live.

What fruit, you ask? Love. Love is the choicest fruit within God's garden. Jesus said, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.... Love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:30-31, NIV). In these verses Jesus made love the defining character for Christians. In them we see significance come full circle. God made you to be loved and to love others. Sure, we find significance in receiving unconditional love, messy past and all—but we also find our true identities in giving unconditional love to others. It's the most satisfying treat in the universe.

Gardens are not just for fruit but for flowers, too. For decades, nothing said, "I love you" like a beautiful bouquet of roses. During the Victorian era, flowers spoke a language of their own. Each bloom and specific color held a special meaning. Most Victorian homes had a guidebook for deciphering the language of flowers. You could even answer a question based on the hand with which you presented a flower.

The Old Farmer's Almanac said that a white lily meant my love is pure, peonies represented bashfulness, rosemary portrayed remembrance, and tulips showed passion. Bouquets could express entire sentences. You never wanted to receive a yellow carnation since its message was utter disdain.



The flowers I've listed so far are those that grow in home gardens or a hot house tended carefully by human benefactors. But some flowers defy boundaries, they grow where they please and often they thrive in raw nature. These types of blooms are known as wildflowers. Britannica.com describes them as "any flowering plant that has not been genetically manipulated. Generally the term applies to plants growing without intentional human aid, particularly those flowering in spring and summer in woodlands, prairies, and mountains."

Did you know that Jesus pondered wildflowers and their beauty? He thought they were the most exquisite blooms of all. He said, "Look how the wild flowers grow: they don't work or make clothes for themselves. But I tell you that not even King Solomon with all his wealth had clothes as beautiful as one of these flowers. It is God who clothes the wild grass—grass that is here today and gone tomorrow, burned up in the oven. Won't he be all the more sure to clothe you? What little faith you have!" (Luke 12:27-28, GNT). It makes you want to be a wildflower, doesn't it?

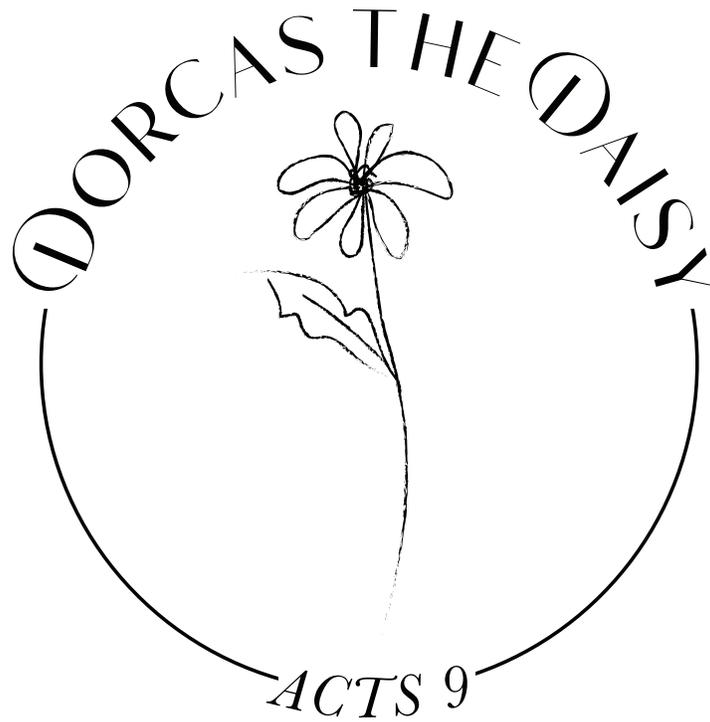
These blessed blossoms find their significance from their Creator and learn to adapt to the topography where their Creator placed them. Simple. Uncomplicated. Natural. They range from yellow yarrow to bluebells, cornflowers to columbine, and primroses to poppies. Even their names reveal their modesty.

*Like wildflowers
you must allow
yourself to grow
in all the places
others thought
you never could.*

This study seeks to discover the women of the New Testament that often go unnoticed, like the wildflower often does. But unnoticed does not mean unimportant. These women thrived in ordinary circumstances by serving an extraordinary God. Dorcas the daisy is the only woman to be raised from the dead. Priscilla the poppy traveled on missionary journeys with Paul and better explained the gospel to newcomers to Christianity. Lydia the hollyhock was a successful businesswoman who opened her heart and her home as the first house church in history. Finally, Euodia and Syntyche the thistles fought for the survival of the gospel but sadly also fought one another. Paul gave some of his most beautiful teachings to admonish these women to get along.

Join me for the next four weeks as we study these women and the wildflowers they represent. Together we'll discover our true significance as "the planting of the LORD, that He may be glorified" (Isaiah 61:3).





DAY ONE: DEDICATED DISCIPLE

Daisies exude joy. These cheerful flowers known for their yellow center and surrounding white petals symbolized innocence and purity to the ancient Celts. In Acts 9, we are introduced to a daisy of a lady named Dorcas. She spread joy wherever she went through “good works and charitable deeds which she did” (v. 36).

Do you have a daisy in your life? For me, that person was Patty Davis. If my garden needed weeding, she pitched in. When I hoped for a new outfit to meet Billy Graham for the first time, she took me shopping. After Nathan’s birth, my chores simply overwhelmed me. One day Patty popped in with her daughter, Becky. Patty did the laundry and light housekeeping while Becky tended to Nathan. And I got a much-needed nap and shower. Patty just had a way to brighten any day.

The true test to determine whether someone is a disciple of Jesus is through love in action. At least that was what Jesus said: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34-35). I knew that Patty was a disciple of Jesus by the sacrificial love she showed me.

Likewise, that’s how the Christians of Joppa knew that Dorcas was a disciple. She used her talent of sewing to provide clothing for widows. And it’s thrilling to discover that she is the only woman in Scripture given the title *disciple*. Wow! What do you suppose that meant? Her life was filled with significance since *disciple* means someone who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another. She stands among good company with the twelve disciples who formed the small inner group that famously followed Jesus. Imagine being drafted into the big leagues.



Read the verse below and answer the following questions:

“At Joppa there was a certain disciple named Tabitha, which is translated Dorcas. This woman was full of good works and charitable deeds which she did” (Acts 9:36).

Practical Observation:

1. Where does our story begin? Who else from our text came from that city?
2. Read Acts 10:9-17, then describe what happened to Peter on the rooftop. What do you think God was teaching Peter?
3. What two names were given to the woman, and why do you think she has both?
4. What title was Tabitha given, and what does it tell you about her?
5. Describe this woman’s reputation and what you might learn about her financial priorities.

*1. **Joppa** was and is a beautiful seaport city on the Mediterranean. Its stone walls protected it from enemies and the encroaching waves. Many believe it received its name beautiful from the way the sunlight hit these stones. Fishermen flourished there.*

*3. **Dorcas** in Greek and Tabitha in Aramaic are both translated gazelle. In the metropolitan city of Joppa known for receiving trade ships from around the world, she likely went by both names, as both these languages were spoken there. Her life exuded grace just like the gazelle.*

*5. **Deeds** declare our faith since James told us that “faith without works is dead” (2:20). The charitable deeds Dorcas performed were expressions of her faith. She used her resources and talents for the benefit of others and in so doing she spread the gospel. Sewing is a form of serving.*

Personal Application:

- a. Do you have a daisy in your life? Describe that person.
- b. Have you acted as a daisy in the life of another? What good works or charitable deeds did you offer?



- c. What is your definition of love? How do others know that you love them?
- d. Describe the attributes of a disciple. Do you possess these qualities? Which qualities do you need to develop?

DAY TWO: DORCAS DIES

According to Norse mythology, daisies represented a new beginning since they are harbingers of spring after a dark, dormant winter. Following our analogy, Dorcas suffered a dark night of the soul when she “became sick and died” (Acts 9:37). I take comfort that even stellar Christians, the disciples that I admire most also face difficulties. When I was diagnosed with stage three endometrial cancer, my treatment led to baldness, bowel issues, and really bad days. The Bible doesn’t sugar coat the real suffering saints may endure and Dorcas suffered her fair share.

But here is the good news: before every resurrection comes a death. For Dorcas, like Lazarus, this death was physical. But for others the death may be metaphorical. Perhaps it’s the death of a career, the end of a marriage, or the demise of a treasured dream. Cancer for me was the end of fertility. I would no longer possess the ability to bear children. I lost *the* greatest female trait of all—the ability to give birth. But God promised that although I would never have another biological child, He would give me spiritual children in abundance.

Let’s look at that time between death and resurrection. Living in this in-between takes faith, loads of it. Why? Because you’re dead. Or someone or something you love has died. There is nothing you can do to spring the dead back to life. The empty womb longs to be filled. The hollow heart aches for its other half. The mind once full of dreams envisions only nightmares. During the in-between, we need what Dorcas had: good friends. People who can see a bright future and who know the best is yet to come.

Her friends did several things. First, they washed her. Of course, that meant ritually. But I believe it was also emotionally as they bathed her in tears as “all the widows stood by...weeping” (Acts 9:39). They valued her life by mourning her loss. Paul spoke of washing people in the Word: “Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word” (Ephesians 5:25-26, NIV). Make sure to bathe people in your tears, your prayers, and the Word of God.

The next thing these ladies did was to lay Dorcas in an upper room. Isn’t that place rich with meaning? Jesus met with His disciples in an upper room to share His Last Supper. And the apostles were praying in an upper room when Jesus appeared to them after the resurrection. *Upper room* will always represent intimacy with Jesus to me. And I marvel that the friends of Dorcas honored her by putting her in a sacred place.



Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“But it happened in those days that she became sick and died. When they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. And since Lydda was near Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent two men to him, imploring him not to delay in coming to them” (Acts 9:37-38).

Practical Observation:

1. What happened to Tabitha?

2. How was she cared for? Who do you think tended to her needs?

3. Who was visiting in nearby Lydda, and why is this significant?

4. Who was sent to Peter, and what titles were they given?

5. How did they make their request to Peter and why?

*2. **Washed** describes a lovely ritual Jews performed for the dead. The washing here was likely performed by the widows, the friends of Dorcas. The ones who knew her best loved her most through this tender care. This washing focused on the hands, feet, and face.*

*5. **Imploring** is more intense than mere asking. It holds the idea of pleading or begging with a deep concern. The friends of Dorcas weren't willing to take no for an answer. Peter was more than willing to fulfill their earnest request by immediately departing.*

Personal Application:

- a. Have you experienced disease, darkness, or the death of someone or something you loved? How did God help you during this season?

- b. There are circumstances that create a before and after in our lives. What does that look like in your life? What happened during the in-between?



- c. Read Romans 8:38-39, then make a list of the forces mentioned in the text. Can any of these entities separate you from the love of God? Write a prayer of thanksgiving to the Lord for His faithfulness.

DAY THREE: DONATED DRESSES

Just like the perennial daisy that returns year after year, Dorcas would rise again. At least, that's what her friends believed. Their final favor was a tremendous act of faith. Unwilling to accept death as the final answer, they sent for Peter. Why? What could Peter do? I'll tell you what. By now, news had spread about the incredible power and anointing that had fallen on Peter on the day of Pentecost. The crowds saw him speak in tongues, and immediately following, he preached a barn burner of a message and "three thousand souls were added to them" (Acts 2:41).

Right after this awesome revival, Peter was walking through the temple area and "a certain man lame from his mother's womb" cried out to Peter to be healed (Acts 3:2). Peter told the cripple, "Look at us" (v. 4). Expecting to receive money the man gave his full attention. Then, full of faith, Peter proclaimed, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk" (v. 6). That's bold. Peter had never performed a miracle before. The Spirit within him certainly stirred up an unbelievable faith. And the lame man rose up and walked. Acts 3:8 tells us the man went "walking, leaping, and praising God."

I love the friends of Dorcas. It's as though they come in a clump. Whatever they do, they do it together. It reminds me of the motto of the Musketeers, "All for one and one for all." Certainly we are better together. There is power in the *we!* Jesus understood this when He said, "For where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them" (Matthew 18:20). Wouldn't you know that daisies are the kind of wildflowers that grow in clusters just like Dorcas and her friends.

Peter responded immediately to the message from Dorcas' friends without knowing what they wanted. He joined them in the upper room and the women were showing off the lovely garments made by their friend. Oddly, he dismissed the weeping crowd. This task was private. Just two disciples: one dead, one very much alive—and the promise of Jesus. "Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these" (John 14:12, NIV). Stop right here. To whom did Jesus make this promise? *Whoever* has faith in Him! Peter took that seriously. So should we. Oh Jesus, give me the faith of Peter, Dorcas, and her friends. Embolden and empower me to do greater things. Amen?

Read the verse below and answer the following questions:

"Then Peter arose and went with them. When he had come, they brought him to the upper room. And all the widows stood by him weeping, showing the tunics and garments which Dorcas had made while she was with them" (Acts 9:39).



Practical Observation:

1. How did Peter respond to the disciples' request?
2. Where did they take Peter? What event does this location call to mind?
3. Who were the people in this place? Describe their emotional state of being.
4. What did they show Peter, and how might this impact him?
5. Explain what he learned about the legacy of Dorcas.

3. *"Weeping may endure for a night, but joy comes in the morning," wrote the psalmist (30:5). None of us escape pain and sorrow. In fact, it's a common denominator of being human. Sorrow, however, doesn't stay forever. God's mercies are new every morning, offering us beginnings each day.*

5. *Handmade gifts are the best gifts since they come from the heart and the hands. Dorcas gave her time and talent besides her money to bless the widows in her life. James reminded us that "pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble" (1:27).*

Personal Application:

- a. Do you have a special place—an upper room—to meet with God? What things do you do in the space? Do you invite friends to join you there?
- b. The friends of Dorcas honored her with tears and testimony. Take time to journal about a person in your life who deserves appreciation. Reach out to them this week to offer your gratefulness.
- c. Peter was called to this place for a purpose. Do you have a situation in your life that requires "two or three" or more? Who would you reach out to for help?



DAY FOUR: DEATH DEFEATED

What makes a perennial return year after year while annuals are one and done? Botanists call them cold-hardy plants, meaning they can survive winter and come back to bloom another day. You might say that Dorcas was dormant and a bit of Sun-shine would bring her back to life.

Peter was just the guy to bring intense light. A friend of mine recently posted, “Have you ever met someone that was sunshine in human form?” Just being with these types of people bring great growth in our lives. I’ve observed that these light carriers spend large amounts of time at the feet of Jesus and it was no different for Peter. After the crowds cleared the room, he dropped to his knees in prayer. Don’t miss that. Some people run to a situation and think they need to do something. Others arrive knowing that it is God who must do something. Peter knew the limitations of his flesh and the unlimited ability of God.

Peter prayed just two words: “Tabitha, arise.” That’s it. No fasting. No fretting. No long, loquacious words. What happened in response to his radical faith? “She opened her eyes” (Acts 9:40). Have you heard the saying, “There are none so blind as those who will not see”? It is possible to look at someone and never really see them. Or look at a problem and never observe the solution right in front of your face. Maybe suffering is a way to open your eyes.

Peter presented Dorcas to her friends alive! What a reward for their faith. Instead of planning for a funeral they prepared for a resurrection. The cluster brought revival. Imagine how Dorcas felt. How incredibly grateful she must have been. I wish that Scripture told us what she did in the years that followed. What we do know is that she holds the honor of being the only woman in Scripture to have risen from the dead.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“But Peter put them all out, and knelt down and prayed. And turning to the body he said, ‘Tabitha, arise.’ And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. Then he gave her his hand and lifted her up; and when he had called the saints and widows, he presented her alive” (Acts 9:40-41).

Practical Observation:

1. List three things Peter did. Explain why you think he wanted privacy.
2. What did Peter say, and where do you think he learned this?
3. What happened next? How do you think Tabitha felt?

1. Knelt down is a lovely way of saying to bow. This posture speaks of complete humility. Some stand proud. Others sit in judgment. But when we kneel we show our vulnerability, our need for someone greater than ourselves. Those who bow down will witness God rise up on their behalf.



4. What did Peter do next, and what position did Tabitha assume?
5. Who did Peter summon? Describe how you think they felt.

2. Arise is the only word Peter spoke besides the woman's name. When honest and sincere, prayer can be simple. God knows the heart and we don't need to convince Him of something with many words. Arise. Get up. Stand up. Get out of bed. So much meaning in just one word.

Personal Application:

- a. Has God ever called you to solitude, a season to talk to Him alone about a problem? Describe that situation and what you learned in the midst of it.
- b. Prayer comes in all shapes and sizes. Peter's prayer was short and succinct. List some of the prayers you have obsessed over with long, drawn-out sentences. How can you reduce these to very few words? Now, offer this to God and let Him take care of the rest.
- c. Two things described Dorcas post-resurrection: 1) She opened her eyes. 2) She rose up. Reflecting on your time of darkness, disease, or distress, how can you simply open your eyes and rise up? What is God asking you to do today?

DAY FIVE: DIVINE DESTINY

Back to our wildflower analogy. Daisies are composite flowers. That means they are actually two flowers combined into one. The inner yellow section is called a disc floret. The outer white petals are known as a ray floret. Dorcas enjoyed two lives while walking the earth. Imagine when we meet her in heaven to hear this tremendous tale face to face. While you and I may not experience resurrection until that Great Day, God does offer His daughters second chances. New beginnings. Do-overs. He's delivered me from depression, debt, and spiritual dryness to dancing, financial liquidity, and refreshing living water. Wherever you are, no matter what season or sin has gripped you, like Dorcas, you can experience renewal.

One final epitaph. Did you know that daisies are edible? Their leaves offer a tangy addition to your



salad. However, I confess I'm not keen on sampling one. More importantly the daisy possesses medicinal properties. Wild daisy tea is used to treat coughs, bronchitis, inflammation, and more. Applying wild daisies to wounds on the skin is also an effective treatment. As news of Dorcas' resurrection spread throughout Joppa, we learn that many others believed in the Lord. Her life, death, and resurrection brought spiritual healing to sin-sick souls. What about you? How has God used your pain for His gain? Do you share the story of Jesus' power to restore with others hoping that they, too, would experience new hope? Your test can become a testimony when you learn the lesson and give it to Jesus.

Read the verses below and answer the following questions:

“And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed on the Lord. So it was that he stayed many days in Joppa with Simon, a tanner” (Acts 9:42-43).

Practical Observation:

1. Where did this good news travel? How do you think it was spread?
2. How did many of the people respond and why?
3. What decision did Peter make after this event and why do you think he did?
4. With whom did Peter stay and what was his occupation?
5. Look over Acts 10 and explain why you think God extended Peter's stay.

*2. **Believed** carries the idea of finality. Those that heard of Dorcas' resurrection believed. They didn't need to be reassured or convinced again and again. Jesus said, "Don't be afraid; just believe" (Mark 5:36, NIV). Belief is unshakeable.*

*4. **Simon** is significant because he shows that the gospel would be open to people of all professions. When Jesus invited Matthew the tax collector to be one of the Twelve, it was scandalous because Jews hated the IRS. Equally, tanners were shunned because they worked with dead animals and urine. The gospel reaches to the uttermost and to the guttermost.*

Personal Application:

- a. News of Dorcas' recovery spread throughout the region. After one of your recoveries, how did you spread the good news of our Savior? If you have not, would you do so this week? Share your testimony that others may be saved.



- b. Make a list of people you pray for and ask that they find salvation soon. Write a prayer asking God to send them a messenger who believes in the resurrection.
- c. Peter decided to stay in Joppa with Dorcas and her friends. Have you ever heard God tell you to stay when in your heart you wanted to go? Describe what you learned during this time.

*At evening when I go to bed
I see the stars shine overhead;
They are the little daisies white
That dot the meadow of the Night.*

*And often while I'm dreaming so,
Across the sky the Moon will go;
It is a lady, sweet and fair,
Who comes to gather daisies there.*

*For, when at morning I arise,
There's not a star left in the skies;
She's picked them all and dropped them down
Into the meadows of the town.*

—Frank Dempster Sherman

HOW TO GROW A DAISY

Daisies are a great choice to brighten up any garden. They are some of the easiest flowers to grow, and they need little to thrive. “Stunning, reliable bloomers both in the garden and as cut flowers, daisies are hardy, drought-tolerant plants that provide years of gorgeous, classic charm.”¹

- Light: Most daisies thrive best in full sun.
- Soil: Average to sandy soil works well for daisies.
- Spacing: Give at least twenty-four to thirty inches for plants that propagate quickly.
- Planting: When planting potted plants, it is best to plant in fall or early spring. Seeds can be planted during winter, spring, or fall.

¹“How to Plant, Grow, and Care for Daisy Flowers,” Kellogg Garden Organics, December 22, 2020, <https://www.kelloggarden.com/blog/gardening/how-to-plant-grow-and-care-for-daisy-flowers>.