



2022 is the Year of the Gladiolus

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Gladioli were my grandmother's second favorite flower, right after roses. When my grandfather died and she moved in with my parents, I would bring her bouquets of glads, when in season, from a neighborhood farm stand. When I finally had a place with a yard, I planted them for myself and for her.

Glads are definitely the cheerleaders of the summer bulb world. Most are big, bold and beautiful with their funnel-shaped, colorful blooms. These festive flowers herald mostly from Africa and the more arid Mediterranean regions. They symbolize strength, victory, heroism, and pride. The name, gladiolus, comes from the Latin word for sword, 'gladius'.

Gladioli belong to the iris family consisting of more than 250 species. It wasn't until the late 1800s that breeders began tinkering with them but since then thousands of named forms have been developed. Flower forms range in size from 2 to just over 5 inches in diameter and may be plain-petaled, ruffled, crimped, frilled, waved or horned.

My grandmother grew the large old-fashioned grandiflora hybrids with a huge color range including both straight and bicolors. There may be 12 to 20 five to 6-inch blossoms on 3 to 4-foot tall plants. Staking is generally required.

Dwarf grandiflora hybrids reach only 2 to 3 feet in height and have smaller 2 to 3-inch blooms. Butterfly and 'Glamini' glads are often put in this group. Usually these plants do not need to be staked.

Nanus hybrids have a more limited color range of pinks, reds and white. Reaching only about 2 feet tall, their flowers are daintier, work well in perennial beds, and often overwinter as far north as USDA hardiness zone 5.

To grow great glads, they need a sunny site and well-drained fertile soil with a pH in the mid 6s. Flowering usually takes place 80 to 90 days after planting. Once the danger of frost passes, plant corms at two-week intervals until the Fourth of July for a succession of blooms.

Plant the corms of the large grandifloras 6 to 8 inches deep and apart. If glads are grown primarily for cutting, space them a little farther apart. The deeper planting helps blossom laden stems stay upright. Wider spacing results in taller plants with larger flowers. The smaller glads can be planted a bit shallower, usually 3 to 4-inches deep. Make sure glads have adequate moisture during the growing season as drought stressed plants are more susceptible to insects and diseases. Mulching helps conserve moisture as well as keeping weeds down.



Photo by dmp2010

Gladioli can be grown as annuals with the corms just left in the ground and new ones planted each year. Or, you can dig up the corms in the fall and store them over winter to be replanted the following spring. They really are not difficult to save for next year.

Unlike some summer flowering bulbs, you don't have to wait for gladiolus foliage to die back in the fall before digging. Typically, the corms can be dug up in late October. First cut back the foliage to a couple of inches to make digging easier. Then lift the corms, shake off the soil and place in a rack or box to let dry for a couple of weeks in a shaded, dry area.

Next rub off any clinging soil and the numerous tiny cormels that are often attached to the main corm. These are 'baby' glads and can be grown for several years to maturity if desired. Twist off the top, old dead corm and store the new bottom one in a mesh bag, like those that are used to store grapefruit or onions. Hang in a cool, dry, well-ventilated cellar and replant next spring.

Gladiolus provide gardeners with a great return for not a lot of effort. If you have questions about growing or caring for glads or on other gardening topics, feel free to contact us, toll-free, at the

UConn Home & Garden Education Center at (877) 486-6271, visit our website at www.ladybug.uconn.edu or contact your local Cooperative Extension center.