



J&L Garden Center

The All Season Gift and Garden Center

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Gladiolus

Gladiolus bring beauty and color to gardens and flower beds throughout the summer. They are members of the Iris family and were first found growing among the tall grasses along riverbanks in Africa. The gladiolus have been hybridized over the years to produce the large florets we have become accustomed to. Gladiolus blossoms start opening from the bottom and work their way up the stem, opening one or two at a time. The blossom period, of each blossom stem, can be two weeks long. They make great cut flowers and will remain beautiful in flower vases up to two full weeks, especially if you cut your flower stem when the first floret opens.



Gladiola is plural for Gladiolus. Gladiola bulbs are actually corms, not bulbs. Many gardeners use the word '*bulb*' to refer to any plant that stores energy in an underground storage unit. The definitions and descriptions for the different kinds of '*bulbs*' are listed at the end of this handout.



When To Plant

Gladiolus corms are easy to grow by planting the corms directly in the garden starting mid-April, about the time many trees start to bloom and produce leaves. It is not necessary to start them inside. However, gladiolus can be planted any time of the year in protected areas, or in greenhouses, to bloom whenever they are desired.

Early blooming varieties bloom about 70 to 90 days after planting, mid-season varieties about 90 to 110 days, and late blooming varieties bloom about 120 days after planting. If you want to have gladiola blooming all summer, you can plant a few gladiolus bulbs every ten to fourteen days for about 10 weeks. This staggered planting schedule will help space their blooming time, for an extended period in the summer through the fall. Make sure you plan your schedule so the gladiolus will have time to bloom before the frost.

Storing bulbs during the hot weather, long enough to plant them later, is sometimes difficult. Select the corms that have already started to sprout, to plant first. Put the rest of the corms in a cool area (preferably between 40 to 45 degrees F) to store until it is time to plant them.

Gladiolus will sometimes bloom twice, if the first flower stem is removed as soon as it starts to bloom. Do not remove any of the leaf stems, just the blossom stem. Put the blossom stem in water and let it continue to bloom inside the house.

How To Plant

Gladiolus are heavy feeders. Preparing your soil before planting the corms will improve your results. Thoroughly mix 1" to 2" of **Bumper Crop** into the soil 6" to 9" deep. Add 2 to 4 tablespoons of **Dr. Earth #1 Bulb Fertilizer** for each bulb you plant. Fertilize your gladiolus again, with this same fertilizer, as soon as the shoots reach six inches in height.



Plant gladiolus four to six inches deep (even deeper if you

have a problem with them tipping over in the wind) and two to six inches apart.

Planting Tip: To help prevent glads from tipping over in the wind, try planting the corm on its side. The shoots will grow sideways for about an inch or two before they start to grow upright. The roots will grow sideways for an inch or two before they start to grow down. This extra '*sideways growth*' helps to stabilize the flower stems. You may still have to stake some of the taller varieties to keep them growing upright.



Planting Tip: Another way to help prevent gladiolus stems from tipping over in the wind is to hill dirt around the stems, the same way you hill potatoes or corn. Wait until the stems are 10 inches tall before you start to hill them up.

Planting Tip: Dig a hole 12" wide and 6" deep. Set 5 to 7 corms about two inches apart within the hole. Space these clusters throughout the flower bed. You will have nice clusters of gladiolus flowers to enjoy.



Planting Tip: Plant a group of gladiolus corms in large pots. Space the corms 1 to 2 inches apart and 6 inches deep. The container must be at least 12 to 14 inches in diameter and should be at least 16 to 18 inches deep. The pot needs to have enough soil to maintain a consistent supply of moisture and enough area for the roots to grow without any restrictions. Use an '*extra large tomato cage*' to give the leaf and flower stems enough support to keep them from tipping over.

Cut Flowers

The best time to harvest gladiolus flower stems, to use as cut flowers, is when one or two of the lower flower buds start to show color. Cut the gladiolus flower stems either late in the evening or very early in the morning. Flower stems are usually re-fortified with water and food during the cool, evening hours. Healthy flower stems hold up better in vases than stems that are stressed out. Use a sharp knife and cut the flower stems on a long slant. The flower stems will absorb more water if there is a large surface area that has been recently exposed. Do not remove any leaves when you cut your flower stems, so the plant will continue to feed the corms.



If you want to wait and harvest the flower stems when more of the florets are open, gather them during the middle of the day.

Let the stems wilt a little and then rearrange the florets into a more clustered group before putting them in water. As soon as you put them in water they will rehydrate and the florets will stay the way you arranged them.

Varieties

Gladiolus are available in many different colors and sizes. Some produce fragrant flowers while others do not. Some gladiolus have one inch flowers and others can produce flowers up to six inches in diameter. The smaller growing varieties are the best to use as cut flowers.

Common glads can grow up to 5 feet tall. They are easy to find in most nurseries. They are best in the background of the gardens.

Dwarf gladiolus grow 2 to 3 feet tall. Often times these varieties are also readily available. They are great to use in rock gardens or mixed with other flowers scattered in the garden beds.

Miniature gladiolus grow 1 to 2 feet. They are nice in borders, or near the front of flower beds. Shorter varieties are the easiest to be forced for indoor cut flower use. Miniature varieties are often hard to find, and may have to be ordered from specialty nurseries and catalogs.



Dividing

If you want to dramatically increase the corm size, enough to divide them often, fertilize your gladiolus three times a year. Once when planting, again when the stems are about six inches tall, and again just as the flowers begin fade. This late feeding helps produce more massive corms, which make the corms larger and easier to divide.

Do not dig and divide gladiolus until the leaves turn yellow and die. After digging and harvesting the corms, allow them to harden and dry before dividing them. As soon as the corms are dry, husk the corms of the paper-like covering (known as a tunic) and divide them as necessary.

Gladiolus plants may naturally produce one or two large corms, and several small corms (called cormels) on the sides of the older corms. To divide, simply break the cormels off the old corms and plant any of them that are larger than 1/4 inch in diameter. If a new cormel is large enough, it may produce flowers the first year. Otherwise, it may be two or three years before the small cormels will grow large enough to produce blossom stems. They will always produce leaves, so fertilize them heavily to help the corms grow faster.

Another way to divide gladiola corms is to simply cut a large corm in half. Wait until the corm starts to sprout and then slice it between two sprouts. Let the cut pieces set for a few hours to allow the cut pieces to heal. Dust the corms with **Bulb Dust** and then plant the pieces.

Insects

Gladiola can become infected by a little insect called "**Gladiola Thrips**". This insect makes the flowers fade and die prematurely during the growing season. The best way to prevent, and to control this insect, is to dust the corms with **Bulb Dust** before planting them in the spring. You can spray gladiolus with a systemic insecticide during the summer to help prevent damage from thrips. Once



the damage appears, it is too late to spray them. Do not spray the open florets, or the chemical may stain or damage the flowers.

It also helps to soak gladiola corms in warm (110 degrees) water for thirty minutes before dusting and storing the corms for the winter. Do not soak them in extremely hot water or you may kill the corm. Mix a little **Safer Insecticidal Soap** in the warm water for even better control of this insect. It is almost impossible to control this insect during the summer, so take extra care to prevent it during the spring and fall.

Winter Protection

Unfortunately, gladiolus are not hardy enough to be left in the garden during the winter. Be sure to pull up the corms and put them in storage before the ground begins to freeze in the fall. Inspect each clump individually. Trim off any damaged, shrunk-en, diseased or dead cormels. Dust all the corms with **Soil and Bulb Dust** to prevent them from rotting during storage and to eliminate any unwanted insects. Make sure that all cut surfaces are coated with the Bulb Dust.

Pack the corms in cardboard or wooden boxes. Do not store bulbs in plastic bags; the corms need to breathe during storage. Store gladiolas cool and dry, they do not need to stay moist during the winter.



Definitions

Floret: Individual, small flowers that make up larger flower stems or clusters.

Cormels: A small, or secondary corm produced by a larger corm. Cormels are one of the methods that gladiolus divide and spread.

Gardeners use the word '**bulb**' to refer to any plant that stores energy in an underground storage unit. Only some of these are really true bulbs. What we casually call bulbs can technically be divided into five categories:

True Bulbs: True bulbs have dry, outer scales that form a papery cover called a tunic. If you cut a true bulb open you will see a plant inside, with scales surrounding the embryo. These scales protect the embryo and store food for the plant. Shoots emerge from the pointed top and roots from the flat basal plate. True bulbs include hyacinth, scilla, amaryllis, onion and tulip.

Corms: Corms are swollen underground portions of stem packed with nutrients. They are usually broader than they are high. They are covered with one or more layers of dead leaf bases. If you cut one in half, you won't see any scale rings or a plant. The foliage and flowers arise from buds on top of the stem. Corms include gladiolus, crocus, and freesia.

Tubers: Like a corm, a tuber is a solid mass of a food storing stem. However, it does not have a basal plate, or a tunic like covering. They may be shriveled and hard, or slightly fleshy. They can be flattened, rounded or irregular in shape. Roots and shoots grow from growth buds on the surface of the tuber. Tubers include tuberous begonias, cyclamen, gloxinias, caladiums and potatoes.

Rhizomes: Rhizomes are a thickened, branching storage stem that grows horizontally under the ground. Foliage, roots and flower stalks grow from the eyes along the rhizome. They are solid, like corms and tubers, but they do not have tunics. Rhizomes include cannas, calla lilies, daylilies, bent grass, and quack grass. Some Iris varieties are rhizomes, other iris are true bulbs, and still other iris are fibrous roots.

Roots: Tuberous roots are actually just roots with a thickened food storage structure (not an underground stem). They put out fibrous roots to take up water and nutrients. The buds sprout near the crown by the old stalk. Tuberous roots include dahlias, foxtail lilies, some daylilies, gloxinias, and peonies.

