

glad tidings

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- Suggested story concept
- Sourced photography
- Researched and wrote story

'Priscilla'

Statuesque, sculptural and **GLORIOUSLY COLOURFUL, GLADIOLI** are standouts in contemporary gardens, and their all-out grandeur makes them the perfect pick for dramatic bouquets as well. Here's a beginner's guide to growing these tender beauties.

BY JO CALVERT

➤ UNDERSTANDING THEIR LABELS

Gladiolus hybrids are divided into three groups: Grandifloras, which usually produce one flower stalk (bearing more than two dozen florets) from each bulb; Nanus, which produce two or three flower stalks (each with fewer than a dozen florets) from each bulb; and Primulinus, which produce a single slender stalk (with about two dozen florets) from each bulb. Sometimes called “florists’ gladioli,” grandifloras are often labelled according to the sizes of their largest (bottom) flowers: Giant (more than 14 centimetres across), Large (11 to 14 centimetres across), Medium (nine to 11 centimetres across), Small (six to nine centimetres across) and Miniature (less than six centimetres across). Tall glads can have flower spikes that top 1.6 metres, while smaller varieties, known as “butterfly glads” and bred to suit the middle of a bed, grow between 60 and 90 centimetres tall.

➤ CHOOSING HEALTHY BULBS

Gladioli grow from corms covered with fibrous brown husks and topped with a pointed tip from which the leaves and stems emerge. Choose corms that are firm, tall and plump. If you plan to intersperse your gladioli with other plants in a flowerbed – rather than planting them in rows in a cutting garden, for example – purchase enough bulbs to create clumps of five or more of each colour for maximum impact.

➤ PLANTING THEM PROPERLY

Choose a sunny, well-drained site that’s sheltered from the wind. Dig the soil at least 30 centimetres down to loosen it, adding compost and well-rotted manure throughout. And work a few handfuls of bonemeal or granular fertilizer (such as 5-10-5) into the bottom of the bed or trench (make sure this lies below the planting depth so the bulbs won’t touch it directly). In the spring when all danger of frost is past, plant the corms upright, 15 centimetres deep and 15 centimetres apart. If desired, top with light mulch and place a marker near each clump until the shoots emerge. Glads take from 70 to 120 days to flower; planting successive clumps or rows every two weeks from early June through early July ensures a long blooming time.

➤ HELPING THEM THRIVE

Water regularly and, when the spikes start to show, dig more fertilizer into nearby soil. If necessary, stake the growing stalks; fertilize again when they start to flower. For bouquets, cut glads in the early morning or evening, removing each flower stalk when the bottom two or three florets have opened – using a sharp knife to make an angled cut – and immediately immersing it in water. Or enjoy your glads in the garden, trimming off the stalks after the flowers have faded. Either way, ensure there are four leaves below each cut and let these die back naturally to nourish the corm.



'Jester Gold'



'Charm'



'Violetta'



'Charming Beauty'

➤ LIFTING THEM BEFORE THE FROST

Since young cormlets will have formed around each original bulb, dig the corms up carefully and gently brush away any soil. Trim off the stalks, close to the corm, then let it dry for two or three weeks. Snap off the cormlets and the newly formed, main corm on top, then discard the original bulb, now wrinkled and spent, that's underneath.

➤ STORING THEM FOR NEXT SPRING

Arrange in a single layer on screen- or slat-bottomed containers, or stack in mesh bags or panty hose to ensure

good air circulation, then store the corms for the winter in a dry, dark and cool, but frost-free spot that's protected from mice and mildew.

➤ MAKING MORE

If they have two separate buds or tips, large, healthy corms can be cut in half with a clean knife to produce two viable pieces, each with its own growth tip; do this in the spring a few days before you plant them. The small cormlets, after maturing over two or three growing seasons, should start to produce flower stalks; until they do, plant these small corms only about five centimetres deep. ●

IT'S A GLAD, GLAD WORLD!

- If your birthday falls in August, this is your birth flower.
- Named after the Latin for "sword" (think "gladiator"), gladioli are also known as corn flags, glads, spear lilies and sword lilies, and belong to the same family – Iridaceae – as iris.
- Gladioli comprise about 200 species, native to parts of Africa and regions stretching from the Mediterranean to Asia.
- Beginning in the 19th century, more than 10,000 cultivars have been bred, some by Canadians. In 1890, for example, Henry Harris Groff, a banker and amateur plant breeder in Simcoe, Ont., created his first gladiolus hybrid, then went on to win international awards for his flowers. Across the ocean, well-known European hybridizers, such as Victor Lemoine and Louis Van Houtte, joined the race to breed new glads.
- Amid the ongoing craze for the flowers, American composer Scott Joplin published the "Gladiolus Rag" in 1907.
- Statuesque and a little over-the-top herself, Dame Edna features flamboyant "gladdies" in her stage performances.
- Gladioli provide a nectar-rich food source for hummingbirds, and mice will eat the stored bulbs with no ill effects, but gladioli can be toxic to pets in the garden.
- To help prevent pests and diseases, rotate your glads between three or four different planting spots, from season to season.
- Keep your cut glads fresh by removing spent blooms from the bottom up, trimming the stems, then changing the water.
- To learn more about glads, visit the International Flower Bulb Centre website (www.bulb.com) and the North American Gladiolus Council website (www.gladworld.org).



'Rose Charm'



'Green Star'



'Halley'



'Flevo Party'