Gladiolus

The gladiolus is a beautiful plant that will brighten the looks of any garden, adding an elegant heritage beauty. There are approximately 260 different species of gladiolus, so there is a wide range of colour and heights to choose from for planting. Distinctly, all gladiolas share similar features - leaves that resemble sharp blades and a row of upwardly blooming flowers on a spike shooting to the sky from the leaves. Each tall spike will produce many flowers that open in succession of each other, from the bottom of the spike to the top, over a time frame ranging from a couple of days to a week.

Gladiolus – History
The gladiolus is a common genus of flowers native primarily to Africa and growing in a belt stretching from the area around the Mediterranean Sea all the way to the Far East. It is within this belt that the gladiolus grows naturally and where the climate is the best suited for this kind of flower. Fortunately, for gardeners in other regions of the world, there are hybrids today that allow the gladiolus to be planted in temperate climates. Indeed, the glad has become a common garden plant and in the winter is lifted from the ground each year and replanted again in the spring. During the Roman Empire, the gladiolus was the official symbol of the gladiators that fought within the coliseum in Rome. In Latin the word gladius means sword, and it was because of the gladiolus' sword-like leaves that it has the name we know this flower as today. Another ancient name for the gladiolus was "xiphium," derived from the Greek word "xiphos", which interestingly also means "sword."

Gladiolus – Growing
The gladiolus is, as are many other plants that grow from bulbs, extremely easy to plant and grow. Planting a gladiolus is simply a matter of obtaining a gladiolus bulb, digging a small hole and setting the bulb into the right kind of soil. Luckily, the gladiolus is not very picky when it comes to soil type, and although it has some preferences, it is very straightforward to amend a poor soil into one that the gladiolus will thrive within. When purchasing your gladiolus bulbs, it is wise to inspect them carefully for signs of disease. Each bulb should be firm, well-sized and richly tinted. One infected bulb can contaminate a whole planting.

Gladiolus – Care
When planted, the gladiolus will more or less take care of itself until it blooms - it is a very independent flower. The gladiolus might enjoy a feeding of liquid fertilizer (mixed with water) during the peak of the growing period but is not necessary. Just ensure that the gladiolus does not get over-watered to prevent the bulb from rotting. Insect pests are few and swiftly dealt with using an ordinary organic insecticide.

Gladiolus – Usage and Sentiment
The gladiolus is a fantastic cut flower that will impress visitors to your home and garden. As a cut flower, it stays beautiful and fresh for a very long time and works perfectly as the centerpiece in all kinds of vases or large bouquets. The gladiolus is the birth flower for the month of August. In the language of flowers, giving glads means you might be expressing the sentiment of “love at first sight”, or an infatuation, telling the receiver that he or she "pierces the heart." Gladiolus are also said to symbolize remembrance, and can be appropriately given at anniversaries to celebrate the memories of many happy years together.
Believe it or not, growing the beautiful gladiolus is as easy as planting a bulb in the spring and waiting for it to grow. The gladiolus bulb is so independent that some gardeners pay scant attention to it after patting down the soil after planting, but if you want to take the best of care of your glads there are other factors to consider and optimize. Keep on reading to learn as much as possible about the gladiolus and how to grow it properly.
Growing Gladiolus – The bulb
Gladiolus bulbs are more properly termed corms. The difference - bulbs are made up of layers of modified leaves, while corms are actually plant stems. On top of a corm exist small buds that will in turn grow shoots that produce leaves and the plant itself, while also throwing roots below. The corm of the gladiolus is quite round and resembles a bulb, hence the misnomer. It is from the corm that the actual plant and its root originates so it is important that the corm be undamaged when you buy it and handled with the care. Healthy gladiolus have a smooth outer covering called a husk, and should be firm and not discolored in any way. The corm contains a store of nutrition in order to start growing - all one has to do is plant it in adequate soil and provide water. The corm can also be used for propagation, but more about at the bottom of this page.

AREA SELECTION AND PREPARATION
Plow, rototill or spade your soil as you would for any other garden plants, it is best to move your glad planting from one area to another each year to help prevent disease carryover in the soil. If soil tests or other reliable indicators points to a lack of nutrients, a balanced commercial fertilizer such as 5-10-10 may be incorporated into the soil immediately prior to planting, at a rate of 2-3 pounds per 100 square feet. Avoid over fertilizing. Composted animal manure or leaves should only be worked into the soil in the fall.

Growing Gladiolus – Planting
The gladiolus is not a very fussy plant but prefers a well drained soil that has been mixed with a little enhanced soil or black earth, natural fertilizer or, if possible, autumn leaves so it has a lot of nutrition to use. To be a bit more specific the soil should neither be acidic or non-acidic - a pH-level around seven is optimal for the gladiolus bulb. Soil testing should tell you what amendments you need to make (if any) to optimize your gladiolus planting bed. Once the soil has been prepared, you can plant approximately two or even three weeks before the frost free date in your zone and the gladiolus will flower 8 to 10 weeks after planting. To enjoy flowers throughout the summer you can stagger your plantings for every two weeks until the middle of summer, perhaps ’til the end of June/early July. This should take flowering into early fall while the temperature will stay above freezing in the evenings. For optimal growth, feed the corms at planting time with a high phosphorous fertilizer and again with a high nitrogen fertilizer 7-8 weeks after planting. The corms are best planted around four inches under the surface with their growing parts pointing upwards and no closer than six inches from each other. Once in the ground the planting site need to be richly watered so that the bulbs can get established nicely. This will promise for an attractive, well-covering flowerbed to enjoy throughout the summer and fall.

Growing Gladiolus – Getting new corms
In areas where the gladiolus does not need to be lifted before frost, the gladiolus corm will readily create new corms around it - this is a natural way for the gladiolus to spread and can be used to great effect in the garden. If you do not want the gladiolus to spread and take over the entire garden, it would be beneficial to dig up the surrounding corms every other year and distribute them to friends with gardens, or use them to start a new bed. In temperate climates, however, the gladiolus corm will need to be lifted before winter, and therefore cannot self-propagate. So how do you get new corms? When you dig up the corms after the first frost has killed off the foliage, you will see tiny little corms on the bottoms of the main corm. These are called cormels and these can be separated from the main corm and stored over the winter as well. These cormels can be planted in the garden the following spring and allowed to mature into a full corm over the growing season. Cormels will likely only throw up a stalk and leaf, not flowering until the second year of planting. The idea is to dig these up as well in the fall and the second season they are planted, you will obtain a mature plant.

The gladiolus is a spectacular flower that can brighten up any garden around the globe. Trouble is that it does not grow everywhere in the world because in some places it is simply too cold for the gladiolus to survive. Although it is possible to hibernate the gladiolus corms using a method called winterization it does not mean that all of the corms will survive and the extra work it means might just not make it worth it. Luckily that is where the hardy gladiolus steps in.

Hardy gladiolus – Hardy
The thing about the hardy gladiolus is that the only difference between it and any normal gladiolus is that it can take cold a little bit better. It will not make it harder against winds, diseases or any other problem that might show up in the garden but a little cold is no problem. A lot of cold, however, is. The hardy gladiolus corm might survive temperatures
around freezing but if it drops further this special hybrid of gladiolus will freeze to death all the same. So you better make sure that the gladiolus corm will be alright in your garden even before you buy it, otherwise it will just be a total waste of money.

**Hardy gladiolus – Areas**

How cold it may get in your area is not only dependent on your geographical location, although it is a huge part of it. Closeness to the sea and other factors is very important to know and think about when deciding if the hardy gladiolus is the right thing to plant in the garden. Strong cold winds can also be a real hazard for the hardy gladiolus as it will freeze the ground without any trace. In a garden there are also often specific spots where cold air tends to gather up, these spots will be the first ones to freeze so it will be a shame to plant the hardy gladiolus there. Learn all you can about your garden before planting the hardy gladiolus, or any other plant, and it will help a long way on the road.

**Hardy gladiolus – A little warmth**

If there are any risk that the temperature will drop it is possible to help the hardy gladiolus out momentarily. Most people do not have heating under their gardens and although that would be the simplest and best solution there are other ways to keep the hardy gladiolus safe. By insulating the hardy gladiolus somewhat it will be able to hang in there for a few more days so it is just a temporary solution to a temporary problem, there is no way to hibernate the hardy gladiolus in the ground in several cold degrees with just insulation. Good materials for insulation are the general compost material as extra soil, autumn leaves, wood chips and real insulation mats. With a little luck the hardy gladiolus will survive the short-lived frostbite and bloom again in the spring.

Although it is common to say that the gladiolus grows from a bulb, this is not technically the correct term. A gladiolus grows from what are called corms, with the glad corm happening to resemble a bulb in appearance. A corm is a solid mass with no defining layers or characteristics. If one was to cut a bulb in half, you could see the many layers contained with it. Slicing a corm in half, on the other hand, would be similar to cutting a potato - you would simply see just a solid mass of flesh. What does this mean to the average gardener? Not a great deal in the long run, but certainly it's always fun to learn something new!

**Gladiolus bulbs – Function**

The gladiolus bulb, or corm, has the same purpose as seeds or bulbs do - reproduction. Seeds and bulbs contain everything necessary to become a huge tree, a small plant or a flower. Exactly in the same way, a gladiolus corm contains all that is necessary to start a whole new flowerbed of only gladioluses. Although it resembles a very thick piece of root, the corm will actually grow a whole set of smaller roots through which it will gather both water and nutrition so it can start to produce the actual plant. And each corm will

**Gladiolus bulbs – Purchasing**

Purchasing some beautiful and striking gladiolus bulbs, or corms, is not very difficult. Almost every local garden store, supermarket and online shop has a wide variety of gladiolus bulbs to choose from and the persons attending them can help you find one that will suit your purposes. As there are approximately 260 different species of gladiolus, and a couple of varieties of each one, there are a lot of different gladiolus bulbs to choose from. When shopping for bulbs, it is important to think about the height you want the final plants to be and the colors that would best complement your other garden plants. Gladiolus flowers come in a wide array of colors and blended colors. The most important thing is that the gladiolus bulb, or corm, is not damaged in any way or seem as if it is carrying some sort of disease. The bulbs, or corms, that show any signs of weakness should be thrown away immediately and not be allowed to even touch the soil in the garden. Disease may spread and wipe out everything, game over mister gardener.
**Gladiolus bulbs – Propagating**

Although it is possible to propagate gladiolus by using seeds it is not really worth the effort and time since the result always will rest on the factor of chance. The result will more or less never look like its parents and although it might be exciting to create new kinds of gladiolus every try it is not durable if you want to make a copy of the main plant. Therefore it is lucky the gladiolus grows from bulbs, or corms. The thing is that just like the potato the gladiolus will start creating new bulbs, or corms, under the surface for the sake of spreading. Getting more gladiolus exactly as its parent is just a simple question of digging up the new bulbs, or corms, and replant them elsewhere, it could not be any easier.

**Gladiolus Care**

Once the gladiolus has begun to grow and produce those beautiful flowers that everybody just loves it is time to take care of the plant. Most plants take some kind of work during the growth period or at least during its bloom period but as you soon will find out there are not many things to care for when it comes to the gladiolus, it is almost as if it took care of itself. Continue to read if you want to learn more about how to care for your gladioluses.

**Gladiolus Care – Autonomous**

The thing about the gladiolus, bulb and everything, is that it do not need any babysitting. Actually it does not need anything at all since it more or less is totally independent when it comes to sun, water and nutrition. You can give the gladiolus some liquid fertilizer mixed with water during the summer but it is really not necessary unless the gladiolus seems kind of weak. There is although another issue that might be a problem and that is that a fully grown gladiolus can be rather sensitive to strong winds and it would be a shame to find the stems broken in half. If the gladioluses are not planted in a sheltered position it would be a good idea to support them with something, just in case.

**Gladiolus Care – Winterization**

For those living in a temperate climate where the temperature tends to drop below freezing during the winter there is another serious problem, the gladiolus will not survive. Not if the bulbs are prepared for winterization that is. The main idea of winterization is that the rests of the plants are cut down in the autumn and the gladiolus bulbs are dug up. The bulbs are then washed with water and dried carefully so no loose dirt is left on them, that is so there are no diseases that tags along during the winterization. Then the bulbs are put to rest in a dark and very cool space, a few degrees above freezing is optimal. The bulbs will then believe that they are still underground and rest instead of freezing to death or grow. If all works out right, the gladiolus bulbs can then be replanted when the spring arrives.

**CORM STORAGE**

After cleaning, corms should be lightly dusted with a combination fungicide/insecticide dust, placed in shallow trays, mesh bags or open paper bags to be stored for the winter. Do not use any covering material. A well-ventilated root cellar is ideal but any room with good air circulation in the average home basement will suffice, if temperatures can be kept between 38 - 58 degrees. The lower temperature is best.

**Gladiolus Care – Thrips**

A very common problem with gladioluses is thrips, which is a tiny insect that punctures a hole in the gladiolus and feeds on the contents that flow within. This seriously damages the gladioluses ability to grow strong and produce flowers, in other words it is a major problem for any serious gardener. Luckily a normal can of environmentally friendly insecticide is well than enough to get rid of this problem but remember that these small fiends can travel miles just by following the wind so an infestation can occur several days in a row but be new thrips every time. Just hang in there and your gladioluses will be safe in due time.