

Chapter One---YES, GLADS!

Glad is a nickname, not a proper name such as Gladiolus. When gladiolus is used in a setting such as "Glorious Gladiolus," it has wonderful connotations and the two words blend beautifully. They create a picture in our mind. Glads itself have an advantage also in implying a joyous happy condition. Glads are well recognized as a synonym for gladiolus. People of the gladiolus cult commonly use the term glad in singular form. Such as a glad corm, glad society and glad show, and in talking about several or many gladiolus simply add an 's' to glad to create the plural form glads. So in this little book, if you find the words glad, glads or gladiolus, be sure we are referring to the glorious gladiolus plant and flower.

The term cult appeared above, but I did not mean to imply it in a religious sense, rather, to infer a group of people having a strong interest in the gladiolus. In fact, a very absorbing interest, such that they talk, think and dream about the glories of the gladiolus. Elmer Gove, a well-revered member of the cult of the gladiolus used the term glad nut to express his infatuation with glads. Many with this infatuation consider that they have been bitten by the glad bug. As with other beautiful flowers, the gladiolus has its staunch followers. Lets examine the merits of glads.

Possibly most people first encounter glads in the flower form. Colors and range of form are great. Virtually all possible colors, except deep green and true blue, are found in the glad portfolio. Within each color there are ranges in shade, markings and blends. Think of a color or color combination and with few exceptions, it can be found. Size of bloom ranges from the tiniest at one inch, up to seven or eight inches in diameter of the floret. Color and size classification of glads will be explained in Chapter Nine Floret shapes of round, triangular, needlepointed, square, rectangular, hooded, lacinated, ruffled, knuckled or dimpled, plain petaled and recurved can all be found in the gladiolus family.

Gladiolus gets its name from the sword of the gladiator, to which the leaf and the unopened spike of the glad plant resemble in shape. The plant of the glad is quite upright in growth and in exceptional cases, heights of seven to eight feet are obtained. The more normal height of glads at the bloom stage are four to five feet. Some low growing glads not intended for cut flower use, may only reach heights of one and a half to two and a half feet. The plants are generally deep green in color. Upon the opening of the flower buds to form the fully opened floret, the first sign of other color appears. The flower spike may contain up to thirty buds, with a normal number being between eighteen and twenty-four buds. Opening of additional buds will continue up the spike, with as many as fourteen, possibly more, florets finally being open at once. The remainder of the buds will continue to open as the earlier opening florets wilt, fade and are removed. A spike may be used as a cut flower or a garden ornamentation for up to fourteen days.

Possibly I should emphasize the economic merits of glads. To the florist, glads are an extremely valuable component of their business. The fact that glads lend themselves to the preparation of large baskets, vases, patinas and corsages, along with arrangements for the home and office, has made a year round demand for gladiolus. They meet florists' needs for all occasions, from weddings to funerals, being supplied from local and around the world growers. Whether locally grown in season or shipped long distances, glads are used extensively. Glads from Europe, Africa, and North, South and Central America, vie to fill a year round market! Spurred by demand, a large wholesale industry exists to supply glad corms and flowers. The transportation industry has also benefited by moving large amounts of blooms by land, air, and corms by sea. Shipping around the world from country to country, season to season, to meet the florist's year round demand for gladiolus. Use of glads as home decorations are popular. Witness the demand for cut flower glads at roadside stands and farmers' markets. The

beautiful spikes are so easy to work within a tall container or to arrange in a low arrangement, using oasis, as a support.

From a dozen or two corms, to hundreds, thousands or millions, the glads are planted in widely varying quantities, by growers. Because of this, suiting the scale of operation to the needs of the market and the situation is easy. Details of successful growing procedures and care will be covered in Chapters four, five and six. Glads are relatively easy to grow, but success in growing glads will improve with experience. Begin on a small scale and progress in size of operation as experience shows probable success. This flexibility in scale of operation allows one person or a family to grow glads to meet many needs. Decorating the home, having a beautiful flower garden, supplying flowers to churches, friends, convalescents and sales to the public at markets, floral shops and even to flower wholesalers, will provide appropriate rewards.

The characteristics of glads lend them the possibility of making beautiful exhibitions. All areas where glads are grown, especially in the United States, Canada, Australia, England, New Zealand and Europe, the existence of flower shows featuring glads will be found. I should recognize that India has a strong interest in glads as a crop. Quite possibly even in Asia and Africa, where glads are native and glad species grow in the wild, interest is there, but little is heard of exhibitions.

The excitement of showing that you can grow the perfect spike motivates these enthusiasts to travel great distances to compete for top honors across the country. Viewing these shows excites the public and benefits those who see the expertly staged new cultivars and colors of glads. Many ask where to purchase these beautiful flowers and are told where to buy and how to grow them. Interest heightens. The glad bug spreads, and the cycle continues.

County, Province and State fairs, and garden club shows generally feature exhibits of gladiolus. These flower shows are a great factor in motivating the individual having a garden interest, to become an avid glad grower. Compared to staged glad shows, they may vary in quality, but are a great encouragement for the individual having a gardening interest. These are all worthy and attainable goals, but you must pay attention to choosing cultivars which may assist you toward that purpose.

The ease with which new glads may be produced from seed, leads to another fascinating activity, that of cross breeding glads or most commonly referred to as hybridizing. The latter term is a questionable usage, but still widely used and will be used to suggest workers who grow gladiolus from seed which have been produced by hand pollination, or cross breeding. Even open pollinated seeds, those produced by self pollination or natural cross pollination by insects or wind, give useful and interesting variations of gladiolus characteristics. I would estimate that there may be as many as 200 people or more around the world, who are now engaged in growing glads from seeds. They are producing new strains and cultivars by this method. New glad cultivars arise also by mutations (sports.) The sports arise from structural changes in the genetic make up of the glads, such as changes in the chromosome structure. Mutations to produce sports of glads are relatively rare and may occur in two directions, such as to produce and revert back. A few very important glad cultivars have arisen as sports.

Additionally, glads have a health benefit. Probably the planting of a dozen or more glad corms in the home garden does not generate enough exercise to be a significant contributor to improved health. Planting care and harvesting of several hundred to several thousand or more glad corms can be a significant source of healthful exercise. People with an inclination toward gardening can benefit from this source of exercise. So, it seems glads as a hobby or an industry, has a lot going for it.

Cross section of corm as dug, before removing old corm and cormels.

