

How to Grow Glorious Gladiolus

Chapter Eight

HINTS ON CUTTING

So little has been written about the subject, so many bad practices are in vogue, and so many stocks of gladiolus have been ruined by failure to harvest the bloom properly. For that reason we are giving a separate chapter to this subject.

Growers unskilled in gladiolus culture so often complain: The corms I received from you did beautifully last year, but this year they did not seem to grow well and the flowers are not nearly as good as last summer. What is the matter with them? The supplier may suggest thrips, disease or improper soil conditions. Investigation in many cases will show up that unsuitable cutting of the flower was a big contributing cause of the decline. More attention needs to be paid to this detail and more emphasis should be placed upon it.

Many gardeners do not realize the importance of permitting enough foliage to remain on the gladiolus plant at the time of flower-cutting to assure that the new corm will be properly developed. It is a general practice to cut flowers with only the flower in mind and so the stalk is cut completely off, a short distance above the ground.

The gladiolus plant is a rugged individual, but it does not have many leaves. Those that are cut off or otherwise removed are not replaced with new ones as in most plants. The leaves are vitally necessary for the process of growth that must go on for up to one month following the blooming season. Unless at least four leaves are left on the plant, it cannot develop a strong healthy corm for next season's planting. The leaves are required to manufacture and store up the food in the growing corm. Without these, the new corm will be only a starved, emaciated one without real vitality. Not only will it lack vitality, it is more subject to insect and disease attack.

The point to remember is that next season's crop both in quantity and quality is determined by what happens to the gladiolus plants after the flowers have been harvested. Up to the time of flowering, the new corm will not have made any appreciable growth. It has begun to form, but it is still much smaller than the mother corm. After the flower has gone the energies of the plant are directed almost wholly toward corm growth. This requires the food manufacturing facilities of at least four full leaves.

If you are saving the bloom from an unhealthy plant that you are discarding, do not cut the bloom with the same knife used to cut flowers from healthy plants. Even when cutting healthy glads, it is best to carry a bottle of rubbing alcohol to sterilize your knife between each cutting. This will stop the spread of disease from glad to glad during cutting.

Pulling up the diseased plants is best and discarding them away from your glad plantings. Do not leave them on the field, where the disease can return to the soil or bugs can chew on them and spread the disease to your healthy plants. In cutting flowers, do not cut across leaves and stem in a way that leaves only an old stump to the plant. The best method is to use a sharp knife with a medium size blade. Do not use shears, as it squeezes the stem. Lay the open blade against the flower stalk somewhere below the flower and above the foliage. Then slide the blade down alongside the stalk to a distance that will give the stem the length needed, pushing the leaves aside in the process. It is probable that the top two or three leaves may be cut off while doing this. Finally, when the blade has been pushed down far enough to provide the necessary stem, turn it in toward the stem, cutting the stem on a slant and returning the blade upward along the other side of the stem. With the other hand, pull upward on the stalk thus lifting it up and out of the leaf sheath. It is best to hold one hand on the stem and use the other hand to cut, and laying the cut bloom in your arm. Be careful in doing so, as not to damage the bloom. The necessary leaves will be left on the plant when this method is used, and a good stem may be had with the flower as well. A little practice may be needed, but once mastered, such cutting comes easily and

may be done very quickly with little actual thought being given to it.

Commercial growers pack or sell ten spikes to a bunch, all one color, or mixed, and places a rubber band tightly at the middle and bottom of the stems. The best time to cut your blooms is early morning, before the heat of the day or late afternoon, after the heat has subsided. Not cutting wilted blooms is advisable, as some cultivars will not come back to their original state.

Remember then that if leaves and all are taken with this year's flower all future flowers of any consequence are really being taken along with it. If at least four good leaves are permitted to remain on the plant, many high quality flowers may be harvested in the season to come.

Once cut, you should bring the spikes into cool quarters or a cooler and place them in containers of water. Even when they are to be used simply for home decoration, giving them time to pick up a full stem of water before using them is advisable. They refer to this as hardening the glads. The gladiolus stem will hold a lot of moisture and when it is well supplied, its keeping qualities are greatly enhanced. When the flowers are to be kept for several days, the stems should be recut each day and fresh water used to replace the old. For longer life of the bloom and better firmness of the stem, as well as better opening ability, consider using a preservative. There are many good preservatives sold today. All will help extend the life of your blooms by keeping the water fresh and the pores of the stem open. This way fresh water can be absorbed thru the stem to the bloom. Two preservatives that come to mind are Flora Life and Chrysal OVB. When preservatives are used to keep the flower fresh, every bud on your spike will open and bloom. If these commercial preservatives are not available, a small amount of vinegar or bleach in your water is also helpful in keeping your water clean.

The development stage at which the flowers will be taken depends to a large extent upon the purpose for which they are to be used. Those used for shipping to the wholesale flower markets will usually be cut when the bottom floret is just beginning to show color. The reason for this is twofold. It permits much more ease in handling and it gives the florist an opportunity to get his flowers before they have begun to pass their prime in lasting ability. On the other hand, such flowers hardly ever open with quite the size or magnificence of those permitted to open farther on the plant. For this reason many florists who buy their gladiolus direct from the field of the grower prefer to have one or two florets fully open. It makes for satisfied customers on the retail level. When gladiolus are cut primarily for show purposes they should be allowed to open on the plant if so doing will not expose them to damage from insects and the elements. Probably a majority of exhibitors will permit at least the bottom two florets to open, and then bring the spike inside away from the insects, heat and storms for the final blossoming. In this area personal judgment and experience must play a large part. Along with preservatives, an eighth cup of sugar per gallon of water, will help the florets open to their maximum size. When sugar is added to water, it shortens the life of the preservative and the water must be changed more often, usually every three days. With the use of a cooler, preserved water and sugar, gladiolus may be cut seven or eight days before a show. When used for decoration in the home consider whether you want a flush of color for special entertaining or for enjoyment throughout the week. Since only the gardener himself must be satisfied, he must decide at what stage to cut the bloom.

Cutting flowers is far from a complicated thing, and not much need be said about it except:

1. Be sure to permit at least four good leaves to remain on the plant to develop the corm for next season's planting.
2. Most bouquets have an early death because the water they are placed in goes rancid. Preservative is essential, if all buds are to bloom.

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