

Chapter Four - PLANTING

An advantage of growing gladiolus is that they are not too particular in their soil requirements. Location, however, is important, since glads like Full sun, good drainage and a reasonable amount of water.

Glads do not like competition from woody plants. Trees use their water, soil nutrition and block their sun. Growing glads with early or late shade from distant trees or buildings is possible, but too much shade makes them spindly and with little vigor. Excessive shade will delay blooming or prevent it.

Rotating your gladiolus planting to a different section of your lot or garden is advisable, if you have previously grown gladiolus. Disease may collect in an area planted to glads year after year.

It is a common misconception that glads require sandy soil, probably because most commercial growers plant in sandy soil. This is not a requirement, but helps a grower with early planting, drainage and digging. I have seen many beautiful show glads grown on heavy soil with proper drainage. Glads don't even seem to care if the soil is gravelly or looks more like shale, than soil. Gladiolus adapt to almost any soil type if they are given full sun, adequate water and proper drainage.

Because drainage is important, you should select a location on the higher end of your garden or lot, that usually does not permit water to stand. Gladiolus like moist soil, but they do not like their feet wet all the time. In selecting your planting location, make sure it is accessible to your water supply, if conditions become dry.

When preparing the soil for planting, it can be plowed or spaded in the fall, if the soil is heavy. This allows it to freeze and thaw during the winter months and will mellow out the soil by spring. It can be plowed spaded or rototilled in the spring after the soil is dry enough to prevent compaction or caking. If it is sandy where it might blow and erode this is probably preferable. Ideal conditions are where the clods will break apart easily and not make a ball when crushed in your hand.

Most gladiolus growers plow their soil to a depth of six to eight inches. This makes it easy to create a furrow in which to plant your glads three to six inches deep. In this Modern age, I myself have tried no till planting, with excellent success. If you are landscape planting with glads, a hole five inches deep, filled in with loose soil, will work.

Glads like soil with good fertility, so if you are planting a large number of glads, a soil test listing your pH and nutrition, may be advisable. County Extension offices and many universities and country stores that sell fertilizer, will do soil testing for you for a small fee. They can also read your test and give you advice on fertilizer recommendations. For most small growers, glads do well on any soil fertile enough to grow your normal vegetables. Glads like soil above 6.5 pH and soil with a pH of 6.8 to 7 will deter diseases that cause corm rot. If your soil is below 6.5 pH, add lime to raise it

closer to 7. Crushed limestone at one pound per hundred square feet, will raise the pH about one tenth of a point, or about eight to twelve pounds to raise it one full point. Composted leaves, peat moss and fertilizer have a tendency over time to lower soil pH. Some important nutrients become less available below 6.5. If a soil test is not practical, applying three quarters to a pound of 8-16-16 fertilizer per 100 square feet, will get your glads off to a good start. When applying lime or fertilizer, some incorporation is advisable, but do not place fertilizer directly in the row, for it can Burn young roots and tender corms. Although they do not recommend animal manure as it increases disease, humus, such as peat moss or well-decayed compost can be worked into the soil. Do not compost any diseased glads or glad tops. Discard these away from your planting, as they may carry disease. If practical, a fall cover crop of wheat can be useful to add organic matter and protect light soils. Make sure this cover crop does not get too much growth in the spring. A heavy cover crop tilled into the soil in the spring can cause neck rot, from the decaying organic matter. If soil is very heavy, commercial soil conditioners or sand can be added.

Start planting your corms when you would plant corn in your area or when the trees start to leaf out. You cannot permit the corms to freeze, but a little frost will not harm the underground corms.

If you want to have blooms over an extended period, either plant a few corms of the same cultivar every seven to ten days, or buy several cultivars with different blooming times. They will classify most glads as either early, mid season or late, which means they can bloom from sixty-five days up to approximately 100 days, after planting. A combination of different maturities and planting every seven days, will usually supply you with beautiful blooms all summer. Also, a combination of large and small corms will alter the blooming times. Although small corms usually have less bud count, they can be beautiful nevertheless, blooming a few days later than large corms.

It is not necessary to dehusk your corms before planting. Many do so to inspect the health of the corms or de-eye for exhibition spikes. In this way, the diseased corms can be discarded and eliminated from your planting stock. Most corms have six to eight eyes on the top for potential shoots or sprouts. Usually only two or three will grow, with the others in reserve if something happens to stop the growth of the ones that have started.

If you desire many medium blooms this is fine, but if you want one giant bloom for this cultivar, de-eyeing is necessary. De-eyeing is removing all but the strongest eye or bud, with a knife or tip of a potato peeler Cut deeply into the corm to remove the complete base of each sprout. This will give you only one sprout and all plant energy will be directed to this single spike, making it maximum size for its potential. De-eyeing miniatures is not advisable for after all small is the desired effect. De-eyeing is usually done a few days or weeks ahead of planting to let the scar dry. See illustration on page 23.

Make your trench to plant your glads in, three to six inches deep from ground level, not from top of furrowed out soil. This can be done with a hoe or rototiller with a spade

row maker attachment. Most garden tractor dealers sell furrow makers or plows which make this job easier. Some have devised their own attachments for their particular garden tractor or rototiller. If your soil is light, sandy and dry, plant your corms five to six inches deep. If you have heavy clay soil that tends to be wet and crusty, planting three to four inches is best. The other variable in planting depth is corm size. Jumbo and large corms can be planted a maximum depth of six inches, where medium and small corms should be planted progressively shallower up to three inches.

The distance between corms and rows is determined by space available, purpose of glads being grown and the type of cultivation desired. Miniatures require less space, whereas the larger flowered cultivars take more space. In landscaping, glads can be planted in clumps of several in a twelve-inch circle or three inches apart in a row for a backdrop. For most, who want to walk through and enjoy the glads close up, five to eight inches apart in twenty-four to forty inch rows is considered best. This also allows for easier weeding and cultivation. The showman will usually plant in rows spaced 36 to 40 inches apart with corms spaced 12 to 14 inches apart in the row. In this way he can groom, stake, protect and fuss over each potential winner. This extra space provides each glad a larger area from which to feed, with little competition for sun, water or nutrition. From the back yard gardener to the showman, each has a special row and spacing requirement to fit their needs.

Place your corms in the trench with your desired distance between, sprout up, base down. The base has the round scar from where the old corm was removed and the new roots will appear from around this scar. The top has the eyes and new sprout appearing. If the corm already has a sprout, place it in the ground with the sprout and tips pointed up, even if this means the corm is placed on its edge or upside down. Once this sprout has pointed up, it's difficult to change its direction. For most growers and all showmen, tags are placed in the row to mark cultivar, for future reference.

If you have trickle irrigation, the hose can be placed beside the corms at this time. Many garden centers are now selling these systems, used to conserve water. An insecticide placed in the trench before covering will discourage underground insects. The trench can be filled level at planting time, but I have found covering the corms with two inches of soil at planting time and later hilling in needed soil when glads are several inches above ground level permits the glad to get a quicker start, especially in colder heavy soils. Shoots will appear in about a week in ideal weather or up to three weeks if weather is cool and damp.

You can check with your County Extension office or local garden center for pre-emergence weed killers, some list gladiolus or ornamentals on the label. Check labels for rates and directions to see if glads and ornamentals are still listed, as label changes occur with recertification.

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