

Chapter Five - GROWING SEASON CARE

Care for the gladiolus begins soon after planting. If conditions are dry and hot watering may be needed to get the new growth off to a quicker start. Soaking the ground to corm depth once before emergence, is usually sufficient. From here growth is rapid and with the warmer weather bugs and animals who love the tender spikes may appear. Each person has their own method of dealing with an animal problem, from live traps for small critters like rabbits to scent sprays to keep deer away.

For the backyard gardener, check with your local County Extension Office or local garden center for insecticides listed for use on gladiolus. Spray in accordance with insecticide label will keep most chewing insects under control. Thrip, Japanese Beetle or Mites can spread disease or destroy glad foliage and the flowers. Even at this young stage, glads must be checked for damage, especially if it is dry and you are irrigating, as bugs will migrate to the juicy tender plants CAUTION Follow all label directions when using sprays. Check to see that gladiolus or ornamentals are still listed on the label, as label changes occur with recertification.

Along with the increased temperatures, weeds appear. Hand weeding light cultivation or use of pre-emergence chemicals to retard weeds may be necessary. If you haven't applied your pre-emergence chemicals earlier, you may do so now after weeding, as pre-emergence chemicals will not kill weeds already emerged. Once again check with your County Extension Office or local garden center for herbicides approved for use on gladiolus and read the label for proper use. Other than this, all your glads need for rapid growth is food, light, water, air and a healthy environment. If you have any doubts on weed or insect control, your County Extension agent garden center, or Glad Society, will be excellent sources of information Thru the summer, a light cultivation between rows not only kills weeds and lets air into the soil, it also breaks any surface crust and loosens the soil which retards moisture loss. This is advisable anytime the soil becomes crusty. If you didn't fill the trench to ground level when planting loose soil can be filled in to cover small weeds, as the glad grows above ground. Otherwise, you should start hand weeding. At the six week growth stage, your glads are only showing foliage, but are now producing the flower which will not be seen till later in the summer. I feel this is a critical time for nutrition and water for this is when your bud count is set Irrigation and side dressing with nitrogen is advisable. Using calcium nitrate is best, as this calcium-based formula of nitrogen causes less corm rot than other forms of nitrogen. As your glads reach twelve to fourteen inches high, hilling soil around their base covers weeds and holds your glad spike erect. Pull soil with a rake or mechanical device against the base of the glad stalk to a final depth of six inches above ground level as blooming time nears and foliage reaches maximum height. As the glads reach full height, light cultivating to retard weeds and loosen soil is best. At this time roots are reaching the middle of the row and deep cultivation will prune and destroy the root system. After final hilling, many people mulch to retard weeds and save moisture. Some more common mulching medium is peat moss, pine needles, shredded newspaper, straw and grass clippings. If your soil is heavy or you live in a wetter, rainy area,

mulches can cause corm rot and may pack so tight as to not let air to the plant root. A little common sense should be used when contemplating mulches.

Chapter sixteen goes more thoroughly into control of insects; however when using approved herbicides for gladiolus spray according the label directions This will keep most glad patches in great shape. Be aware however that some insecticides may leave objectionable discoloration on the florets. Organic gardeners have some luck with yellow sticky traps placed in the garden to control thrip. They can also be useful to determine when thrips start to invade your garden, to know when to spray. Japanese Beetle traps should be placed away from your glad patch. They have a scent that attracts the Beetle, so it is necessary to make sure your trap is not located too near your glads. Just before spiking, additional fertilizer can be side dressed. If you are in poor, light soil, a full fertilizer analysis of 8-16-16 can be used again, but for most soils a little calcium nitrate will give you maximum blooms. Each gardener will need to decide the type and amount of fertilizer to be applied. If your soil was properly fertilized at planting preparation time, only nitrogen may be needed during growing season. Sandy soil that leaches nutrition will need more fertilizer than rich humus soil. Too much fertilizer may cause growth problems, so don't be too heavy handed when it comes to applying fertilizer.

Irrigating through the growing season to keep soil moist, not wet, is advisable. It is especially important during the flower spiking stage. You should soak to root depth, as shallow watering only germinates surface weeds. Keep in mind your rain fall and that water must reach the roots. Often after a light shower I will turn on the irrigation to help the moisture reach the roots. If watering is not possible, nice glads can be grown, if there is enough water to grow corn in your area.

When the glad spikes, you may want to tie it to a stake to hold it upright on windy days. This is especially necessary if you neglected to hill the glads to a depth of six inches. Miniature and shorter landscape glads usually only require the hilling and not the staking. More assistance on this can be found in Chapter Seven, Growing for Exhibition, and Chapter eight. *Hints on Cutting*. If you suspect disease problems, check Chapter eleven, the *Doctor Book*.

Enjoy your labor as the beautiful spike blooms. Under normal conditions, you will have healthy plants and beautiful blooms.

By: Cliff Hartline