

Chapter Three

STARTING WITH GLADIOLUS

Your first experience with gladiolus might have been as a child in your parent's flower garden at home or at a fair or flower show. In any of these settings, I'm sure your first impression was of the beauty and appeal of this flower.

As an adult, your first experience with the gladiolus may have begun with the purchase of a few corms from your local garden center or chain store. Most people get their start in this manner. Unfortunately, this is not always the best place to get your start. When purchasing from these sources, you are procuring corms that may have set on warm store shelves, packed tight in boxes, for weeks. Gladiolus should be stored in an area with cool temperatures and good air circulation. Because of the huge volume of corms sold to retailers, the number of cultivars and colors are limited and new introductions are usually not available. If you are to purchase from a garden center or chain store, it is best to buy early in the season, when the corms first appear on the store shelves. Check corms before purchasing to see that they are plump, free of mold and harvesting bruises. Look at the base of the corm where the old corm was removed. New root buds may be starting, which is okay, but long dried roots show that the corms were stored in improper conditions and were starting to grow and died. A sprout on the top of the corm is fine, but don't purchase corms with long curled sprouts. If you are purchasing your corms late in the season, check them carefully. Corms should be solid, not mushy or dehydrated, when you squeeze the husk. Gladiolus corms normally require between 65 and 100 days from planting till blooming time. If you are too far north, 90 to 100 day glads may not have time to bloom and develop a new corm before frost. After you purchase corms place them in an area with good air circulation and cooler temperatures until it is time to plant.

It is highly recommended when purchasing gladiolus corms to contact a gladiolus cataloger, who specializes in the many modern cultivars (varieties) available. These specialty catalogers supply not only the newest and finest but hundreds of tried and true old standbys. Good sources of information on gladiolus may be obtained from Local Societies or from the Other Supplier information on this Website. Catalogers also advertise in Gladworld, published quarterly by the North American Gladiolus Council (NAGC) and available to all North American Gladiolus Council Members. Information on joining is located on this Website under Membership. Cultivars come in a variety of sizes forms and colors and you will enjoy making the selection of cultivar corms based on their intended use. Are they to be used primarily for viewing where planted, in the cutting garden, for exhibition or for commercial cut flower purposes? Usually exhibitors will find it necessary to be a bit more extravagant than the person who is thinking of home decoration. They will need a wider range of types to compete in a majority of the show classes available. They will also be willing to pay the higher prices for show cultivars and recent introductions. As time goes on, and the gardener becomes more interested in the gladiolus, he will probably become a collector of all the outstanding cultivars.

Those who want the gladiolus essentially for use in the home will, naturally, want to keep in mind the colors that will be most appropriate. It is understandable that certain colors will not be wanted at all by some. This will not be the case with the exhibitors. Their own like or dislike of a color isn't as important as picking a cultivar with show qualities and a past winning history, whereas the commercial cut flower grower will select based on what the potential purchaser is likely to want, and generally that means a fair variety of colors to satisfy the likes and dislikes of the public.

NAGC, through growers symposiums, compiles listings of highly desirable cultivars each year and the results are published in NAGC's Gladworld publication. Growers who's ratings are used in compiling the symposia are from many areas, thus providing us with valuable cultivar information to make selections for where you live. Catalogers also publish information on the characteristics of each cultivar offered for sale. The prospective grower should read as much information as possible on the subject, visit the summer gladiolus shows and visit gladiolus gardens.

For commercial purposes gladiolus corms are graded by the following sizes. This is the listing that will usually be found for wholesale offerings.

No. 1 corms – 1 ½ inches and larger in diameter

No. 2 corms – 1 ¼ to 1 ½ inches in diameter

No. 3 corms - 1 to 1 ¼ inches in diameter

No. 4 corms – ¾ to 2 inch in diameter

No. 5 corms – ½ to ¾ inches in diameter

No. 6 corms – ½ inch and under in diameter

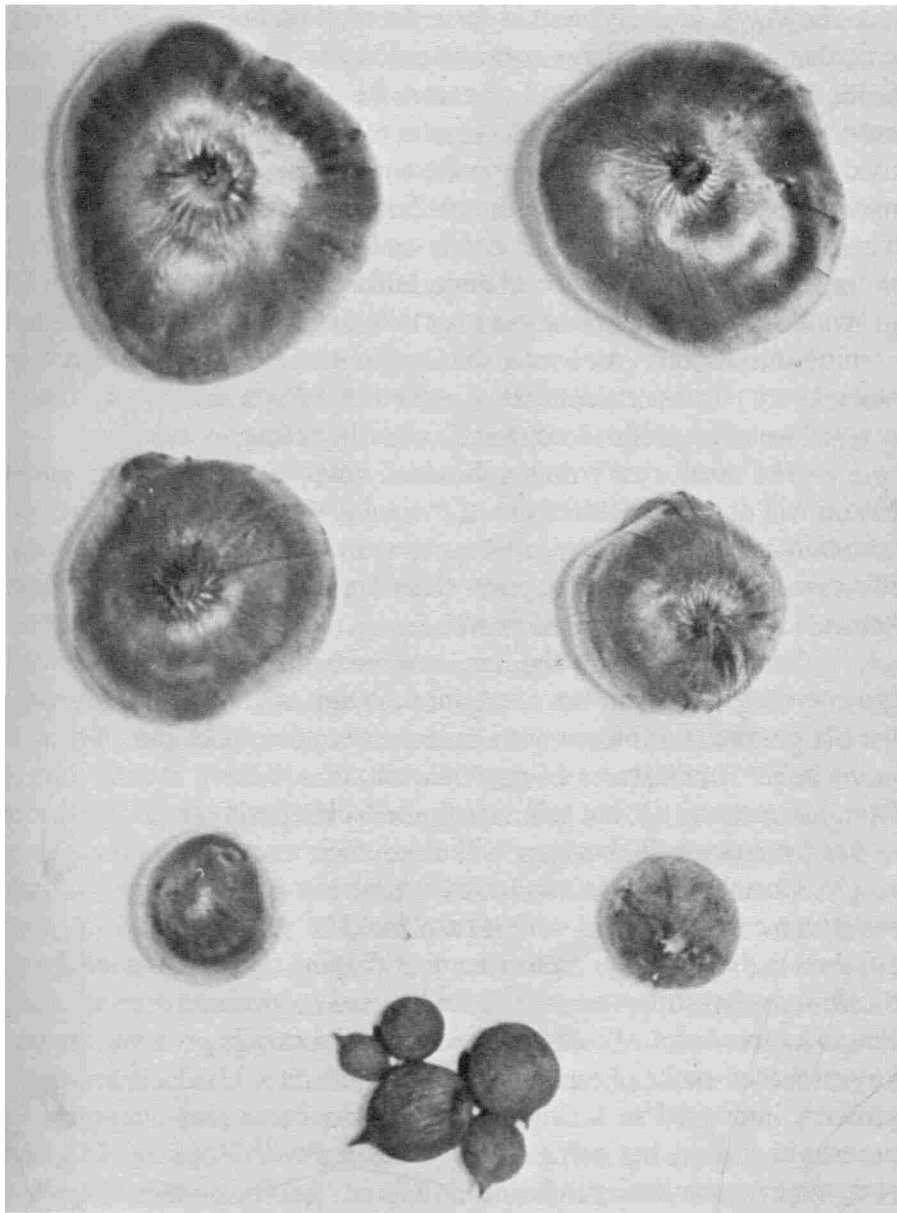
Most retail catalogers list corms in only three or four sizes.

Large.....No. 1 & No. 2 under

Medium..... No. 3 & No. 4

Small.....No. 5 and No. 6 under

The following diagram shows the sizes



Corm Sizes (actual size)

Top: Sizes 1 & 2, large

Middle: Sizes 3 & 4, medium

Bottom: Sizes 5 & 6, small

Bottom Center: Cormels

Although cultivars differ in their growth habits, in general large corms are best used for maximum growth and exhibition blooms. Large corms have the most food stored in them and will therefore be capable of growing to their maximum the first year planted. If the blooms are to be used primarily for decorative purposes and there is no need for maximum flower size the first year, medium sized corms are very suitable. The bloom from these medium corms will be nearly as large as blooms from large corms, though they may have two or three fewer buds. Cultivars grown from medium size corms may also take five to ten days longer before coming into bloom. Some exhibitors use medium corms for the miniature classes. Small corms will usually bloom the first year, but the bloom will not be characteristic of the cultivar in size. These small size corms are generally used by growers who are interested in getting a start of a cultivar at an economical price. They are willing to wait an extra year before harvesting a full sized flower. Some growers and exhibitors prefer the small size corm since the aim is not to get a large spike and bloom but a miniature stature spike and bloom. Miniatures varieties may grow almost as well from a small corm as from a large one. Usually only one flower spike will occur from one small bulb but they will retain their petite miniature stature.

Cormels may also be available from catalogers. These are miniature corms covered with a hard shell like covering and are found attached to the regular or mother corm at digging time. Cormels will grow to replicate the mother corm and can be used to increase your stock of a certain variety. Although cormels need special care in growing, they can be purchased more cheaply than regular corms are used extensively by growers interested in building up large stocks at minimum cost. Also because of their low cost, many hobbyists purchase cormels of the newer more expensive cultivars.

The age of the corm is important when purchasing gladiolus stock. Regardless of corms size, corms should not be more than three years of age and preferably not more than two. This means not more than this number of years from the original cormel from which they were grown. There are a few cultivars that do best from corms that are quite old but this is the exception, Most cultivars begin to retrogress after the corms have reached an age of four or five years, and the gardener interested in keeping his stock at its best will want to replenish it every so often either through growing from cormels or purchasing new stock.

The size of the scar on the base of the corm determines corm age. This is the scar left by the removal of last year's corm at cleaning time. An old corm will show a large scar, and a young one will show only a very small one. Young corms are also usually higher crowned than old ones. Old ones have a tendency to flatten out.

Experience indicates that after the first year or two of growing, the gladiolus enthusiast will not be satisfied with a mixture of cultivars but will want to keep them separate and each cultivar named. It is well to have a good supply of labels for this. Many kinds are available and again the growers own likes and dislikes will determine the choice. The gardener who has a large selection of cultivars to keep separate would do well to consider some plastic labels that are available at reasonable prices. These are used to mark the row and easy to pull and keep with the stock when digging. They can also be placed right in the trays during dipping and storage. Some growers make their own tags from PCV pipe, old Venetian blinds, plastic bottles, etc. Whatever works best for you is fine.

Tools differ very little from those used in other gardening. For the small grower, hand tools such as a spade, garden rake and a hand weeder will do the trick. Gardening becomes drudgery when inadequate tools are used. When selecting a sprayer quality should be the first consideration. Inexpensive sprayers usually fail to provide good results and long service. All gardening today requires a fair amount of time spent in spraying and dusting if proper preventive measures are taken to control insects and disease. Don't try to get by with something that is inadequate.

With a supply of good corms, tools that are equal to the task at hand, labels for marking the cultivars and high hopes the gladiolus grower is ready for planting. To those who have learned about the modern gladiolus, the task of growing will be invigorating and great satisfaction will be experienced when the first blooms emerge.