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Glads Add Color to Any Landscape

Dennis Hinkamp
Utah State University

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GARDEN NOTES

GLADS ADD COLOR TO ANY LANDSCAPE

By Dennis Hinkamp

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If you planted gladiolas in May you should be experiencing a colorful surprise about now. If you didn't, try to work them into your landscape design next year.

"Gladiolas grow from a corm, which is a large fleshy stem that produces the flowers and leaves," explains Jerry Goodspeed, Utah State University Extension horticulturist. "It is not a bulb, but very similar to one. Most glads are tender perennials. This means that here, in the northern part of the country, we have to dig them each fall and bring them into the house for the winter."

In the spring, once all danger of frost has passed, the corms can be planted in the flower bed again, he says. Although glads can be grown in about any soil type, they grow better in a soil that is fertile and well drained. This means if you have a clay type soil you need to work in additional organic matter.

When planting, space glads about four to six inches apart in a group or cluster. This way they provide support for each other and stand up better, Goodspeed says. If this doesn't work, try placing a green, inconspicuous stake to the side of the flower spike and attach it loosely to allow the plant to move with the wind, but not tip over. Plant corms about five inches deep in normal soils, and slightly deeper in lighter soils. Glads planted too shallow are more likely to flop over.

Plant gladiolas in a sunny location that can be watered on a regular basis, he adds. Glads are not a drought-tolerant plant. Keep the soil moist, but not wet. Fertilize with an all-purpose fertilizer at the time of planting and again as the flowers start to form. One trick to lengthening the blooming time of glads is to space the planting dates. For example, plant a few the first week in May, a few more two weeks later and a final planting at the end of May.

Once the plants start to grow they more or less take care of themselves, Goodspeed says. Be sure to keep the weeds away. They detract from these beautiful flowers and glads do not like to compete for the nutrients and water. A good organic mulch can be placed around their base to help maintain a good moisture level in the soil and control the weeds. Once the plant reaches about eight to ten inches, mound a few inches of soil around the base for added support.

Once the flower spikes start to bloom, enjoy them in the garden or cut to use in a flower arrangement, he suggests. If you plan to use them as cut flowers, pick them right after the first

florets open, leaving at least four leaves on the plant itself after cutting. This provides the plant with enough green, photosynthesizing material to generate food for the next year's growth. If gladiolas are left in the garden, remove the dead flowers as they fade. Once all the flowers are gone, remove the spent flower spikes so the plant does not put its energy into seed production.

Normally, glads start to die back about six to seven weeks after they bloom, Goodspeed says. Let them to die back to the corm, if possible. This allows the plant to assimilate as much energy as possible for the coming winter and next year's blooms. Then, in the fall before a hard freeze, dig the corms and remove them from the garden.

Store the corms in a cool, dry location throughout the winter, he says. A storage room or garage closet normally works well. Place them in a box with shredded newspaper, peat moss or other packing material. Label them before storing so you know their color when you get ready to plant them the following year.

For more information, contact your local USU County Extension office.

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