

# Growing Gladiolus and Other Bulbs

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I began bulb growing, in an experimental way, twenty-five years ago, and after fifteen years of experimental work the results were so good I began to abandon a very profitable plant growing business, and turned my attention to growing bulbs and cut flowers for market. I began ten years ago on a very small scale, with less than four thousand bulbs all told, comprising one thousand Gladiolus bulbs, one thousand each of Chinese, and Paper White Narcissus, five hundred Calla Lilies, and two hundred Liliun Harrisii, all of which I had found in my experimental work to be dependable.

With a few other sorts to try out, all occupying about one fourth of an acre, for like most new beginners I gave them plenty of room. This small beginning has increased until my present plantings cover thirty acres with 50,000 to 100,000 bulbs planted to the acre and I believe I am regarded as the most successful grower of winter blooming Gladioli, Chinese and Paper White Narcissi in the United States.

Now as the subject assigned me by our worthy President, is growing Gladiolus and other bulbs, I will devote the most of my paper to Gladiolus, and only touch lightly on other bulbs.

As already stated I began growing Gladiolus, ten years ago with a stock of

one thousand bulbs, and as no bulbs were grown in Florida, at that time, I procured my supply from the North. These bulbs were planted in early spring, and in due time produced a nice crop of flowers.

Now being new in the business and not acquainted with any of the retail dealers, except Mills the Florist, nearly all my flowers were consigned to wholesale florists, in our big northern cities, and the returns for my first crop were about seven dollars per hundred which was very satisfactory to me.

As I was green in the business I cut my Gladioli spikes when two or three flowers were wide open. I dug my little crop of bulbs when fully matured, and stored them away to plant the next year, and being pleased with my first crop, when planting drew near again I ordered ten thousand more bulbs from the north.

I now had one thousand Florida grown bulbs to plant alongside of my ten thousand from the north, and this gave me some new experience. When blooming time came I observed the Florida grown bulbs produced much stronger and longer spikes than those from the north, the blossoms were much larger, with more substance and better color, and when I shipped them the returns for flowers from the Florida grown bulbs was ten

to twelve dollars per hundred and six to eight dollars for the cut from the northern bulbs. I had also begun to cut my spikes when one flower was open.

I now began to get acquainted with more retail florists or more properly speaking they began to get acquainted with me and my trade began to rapidly shift from the wholesale to the retail trade, and I am proud to say I have never lost a customer.

Now as time moved on I gained more experience. In digging bulbs some are sure to be left in the ground and some of these bulbs would come up in the fall, and bloomed in the early winter, and this caused me to think on new lines. I reasoned that if I could grow Gladioli in the winter and put them on the market when flowers were scarce I would make a great hit, but just how to do this was the question. I had found that some of the Florida grown bulbs would come up in the fall and each year the quantity increased, but my stock was very small and I wanted more business. So after pondering the matter over a bright idea struck me.

I would get a dealer in the north to hold a supply of bulbs in cold storage from spring until fall and ship to me in September, first, believing they would start at once and give me a crop of bloom in November, so I wrote to Henry F. Michell, of Philadelphia, and told him about my plan. He promptly answered me saying he could furnish the bulbs, and had the cold storage, and gave me a very reasonable price for the work, but advised me not to go in very deep, saying he had tried this plan quite thoroughly and it had proven a total failure with him.

Then I began to think I was not as smart as I thought I was, and I believe a great many other men have come to this same conclusion about themselves.

I took Michell's advice, and only ordered two thousand bulbs which arrived about September first and when opened up looked fine. They were planted at once in well prepared soil and in about ten days they were poking their noses out of the ground and looked good. They made a fine growth and I felt sure I would be able to send Mr. Michell a nice box of flowers in November, and show him how smart I was, but November came and went and not a bloom did I get. The stalks ripened and died down without showing a bloom, and I left the bulbs in the ground. They came up again in March and gave me a good crop of bloom in May so I did not lose on my investment.

My stock of Florida grown bulbs continued to increase, and all those that had bloomed in the fall kept up the habit, and new ones were breaking in so that my supply of winter blooming bulbs was slowly but surely increasing. I then began to look my stock of bulbs over about September first and I found a few bulbs that were beginning to sprout in the hampers, I decided that if I would select these out and plant them they would come up right away and bloom in due time. But if I planted the entire lot without selection, some would come up in ten days, some in a month, and some all along for about five months.

Now this is not so bad in Florida, where we plant out of doors, and have plenty of land, but this uneven germination does not suit the greenhouse man

in the north and as my crop of bulbs was increasing I now began to look forward to the time when I could offer the greenhouse man a stock of bulbs that would give him a full crop of bloom during the winter whenever he wanted them; and this must be done with bulbs that would start even and not go blind as the cold storage bulbs had done. Now to insure even starting I began to experiment further.

I had a good stock of early ripened Florida grown bulbs put in cold storage about thirty to forty days before I wanted to plant. These all came up evenly in a short while after planting, but only about ten per cent bloomed, the rest went blind. While this was very unsatisfactory, I decided as I had gotten a few bloom to try again, so the next year I put in another lot. Now this second lot gave me about ninety per cent bloom and made an even start and I began to think I was very smart and had solved the problem so the following year I put about two hundred thousand in cold storage in the same way I had done the year before. Now this brings me up to last fall. I planted all of these bulbs and expected to clean up as I had been getting thirty dollars per hundred for the last few years for winter Gladioli; but only one per cent of the lot produced bloom; all the rest were blind.

Well I sure cleaned up, but it was on the wrong side of the ledger, and I can say now I will not try any more in cold storage. I find that Gladioli bulbs will start naturally after six months rest and grow a good crop of bloom. I now have a good supply of bulbs that bloomed in early winter and were dug in February,

some of which I have on exhibition, and these have never failed me.

Now as to the outlook for growing Gladioli bulbs commercially in Florida. The Gladioli is a native of a warm, moist climate, and finds a congenial home in Florida. It should be planted on land that is well drained and not subject to overflow. I plant in two-foot rows, and cultivate with an eighteen-inch sweep which I find is just right to clean out a row, and keep the land ridged up so as to give drainage.

I store my bulbs in bean hampers, and stack them up under the shade of trees and cover so as to keep out the rain. They cure and keep perfectly this way. The expensive way of curing on trays and storing in cellars as is done in the north is useless here.

Bulblets can be planted any time from January to August, and left in the ground until they reach blooming size before they are dug, thus saving the expense of digging every fall to prevent freezing as is done in the north.

Bulblets should be planted very thickly, a quart to twenty-five feet of row is about right. Some will come up in a short while and some will lay in the ground three years before they come up.

As to the quality of Florida grown bulbs I find they produce bloom fully fifty per cent superior to Northern grown, California, or European stock. I have fully tested them with all of these, side by side, and Florida was the winner every time. The outlook is now Florida will soon be the leader in growing Gladioli both in cut flowers and bulbs. Extensive plantings have been made in various parts of the State, in the past twelve

months, and many more are coming; some of the largest growers in the north have sold out and are coming to Florida.

Now as to the other bulbs. I began ten years ago with one thousand Chinese and one thousand Paper White Narcissus, and they have increased until I now have about five hundred thousand of each. I have sold two carloads of the Chinese, in the past two years but only about five thousand Paper Whites, and I still have more Chinese than Paper Whites, as the Chinese increase twice as fast as Paper Whites.

I also have Grand Soleil D'or and Grand Monarque Narcissi. I also grow *Lycojum Vernum*, Spanish and Dutch Iris, Hyacinths, *Lilium Harrisii*, *Amaryllis*, Tuberoses, Freesias, and cannas; all of which can be grown successfully in the State of Florida. I have also tried out a lot of bulbs that were a failure. Among which I mention Tulips, Lily of the Valley, *Lilium candidum*, *Aurantum*, *Speciosum*, Alba and Rubra, Peonies, etc.

Now as to the outlook for the production of the other bulbs in Florida. While I have 1,000,000 *Gladioli* growing, my principal crop is Chinese and Paper White Narcissi. My place has been visited by about a dozen of the leading bulb growers of Europe in the past twelve months, and after looking my stock over, they pronounced it the best they had seen. And some of them have tried out my bulbs in the greenhouses in New York, along with

their own, and they report them as good as the imported, and every one that has visited me say they are coming to Florida to grow bulbs as soon as the embargo goes on. One has already located in Florida, and is expecting to turn out 5,000,000 Paper White Narcissi by 1926, besides a great quantity of other stock.

I have never had any diseases or insects to injure my Narcissi and I do not know of any being found in this State. It is very evident that Florida is the best place in the United States for growing *Polyanthus Narcissi* but the daffodils will do better further north.

*Lilium Harrisii* does well in all of the Gulf States, and small plantings have been made in Florida, Louisiana and Texas. My experience is they should be grown under a slat shade as they are sometimes injured by frost in the open ground.

Calla Lilies are easily grown. They do best on low, moist sandy land that is rich in organic nitrogen. The bulbs often rot badly and I have not found a remedy.

Freesias make a wonderful growth in this State; I have had bulbs that measured one and a quarter inches in diameter but they are not safe in the open ground where the temperature falls below twenty-six degrees.

This is my third year with hyacinths and so far they are very promising. They grow well, bloom well, and so far are free from diseases and insects.