

TOM'S GARDEN

BLOG MARCH 2023

How to grow gladiolus

Gladiolus is also known as sword lily because of its sword-shaped leaves and is native to South Africa. Gladiolus is a good choice when you don't have much room in the flower bed. They grow from 2 to 5 feet tall and are most impressive when planted in mass of about two dozen or more. Even a container on a deck or patio can have a dozen or so glads planted in it for a dramatic presentation.

Planting

Gladiolus enjoy full sun and well-drained soil. Begin planting in mid spring when the soil warms and stagger planting every 2 weeks until mid-July to enjoy the flowers throughout the summer.

Plant 4 to 6 inches apart and about 3 inches deep. Fertilize with 5-10-5 fertilizer when planting and again when flowers appear. Tall varieties will need to be staked. Water regularly and mulch to keep the root cool. Some varieties are hardy to zone 5, however the small bulblets will drain energy from the main plant, so it is best to dig them up and store them through the winter or just purchase new corms each year.

Do you really have to sterilize plant those plant pots?

If you read any advice information about re-using plant pots and containers from year to year, it is always recommended to scrub the pots with soapy water and soak them in

a diluted bleach solution, right? Every gardening book and instructional video will tell you to do just that. I must confess that I don't sterilize and have never had a problem with plant diseases in those pots. You are more likely to have problems from poor growing conditions than dirty pots. I take my pots and knock off the loose soil, then hose them off at the end of the season. They get stacked up in the garage or greenhouse until I need them in spring (or late winter.) I don't have time for all that scrubbing and sterilizing when I'm ready to start seeds and repot seedlings.

Sure, I always purchase fresh seed starting mix and potting soil and don't re-use last year's soil. I can't imagine soaking and washing each individual six pack or small pot.

According to researchers, problems don't arise from dirty pots but from overwatering, poor air circulation, watering the leaves, and leaving humidity domes on too long. Soapy water certainly doesn't hurt anything to wash the pots in if it makes you feel better and you have the time, but I just don't get it done. Go ahead and skip the bleach.

If you think about it, when you eventually put the plants in the ground are you sanitizing that soil? Use clean starting mix and potting soil and there will be no problems.

Spinosad – Awarded organic status Effective against caterpillars, fruit flies, fire ants, and spider mites. Remember that spraying butterfly caterpillars would impact the butterfly population. It is safe around

bees and doesn't harm good insects. Spinosad is safe for vegetables, fruits, and ornamentals. It's OK to use indoors. As always, read and follow the directions on the package.

Pyrethrin

Pyrethrins are applied broadly as a non-specific pesticide. Bees have been shown to be particularly sensitive to pyrethrin, with fatal doses as little as 0.02 micrograms. Due to this sensitivity and pollinator decline, pyrethrins are recommended to be applied at night to avoid typical pollinating hours and in liquid form rather than dust form. Although Pyrethrin is made from the chrysanthemum plant (the flowers are dried and then crushed into a fine powder), it kills a wide range of insects upon contact. It is highly toxic to beneficial insects, such as ladybugs, bees, butterflies, and moths. Pyrethrin is also highly toxic to fish, shrimp, and aquatic insects. The only saving grace, if you want to call it that, is pyrethrin breaks down rapidly and does not persist in the environment.

The Young Seed Planter

Taking care of a small garden plot is a good educational activity for young people. The expectations of an adult and a child are very different. It's important to not have unrealistic goals that a child would find difficult to achieve. You want a child's first gardening experience to be successful, satisfying and fun.

A bad experience such as poor germination or a weed takeover can remain in a child's mind for a long time. Most children want to plant something and see it grow.

It is an adult's responsibility to see that the child has success, especially on their first try.

Choose easily grown plants. Give the child something besides radishes to plant. Sure, they grow fast and are colorful, but they can be strong tasting and woody and the tiny seeds are hard to handle. Beans take only a few weeks longer and the larger seeds are easier to plant. Sugar peas are also a good choice, they can be ready to eat right out of the garden without cooking. Cherry tomatoes are another good and early crop that can be tasted right off the vine. Nasturtiums and sunflowers make a great edible crop and zucchini is always prolific.

Give the child a good chance for success by providing good fertile soil in, perhaps, a raised bed where they can tend the garden without packing down the soil by tramping in it. Keep the plot small so children don't feel overwhelmed. Wait till there is no danger of frost, delay planting if necessary. Choose some type of weed control such as mulching and make sure plants have the proper spacing to grow.

Teach gardening lessons such as waiting until the ground dries before digging in it and respecting nature by not using chemicals, pesticides and herbicides. Teach children to water deeply rather than water lightly every day. Teach them that bees are our friends and most of them won't sting and are needed for pollination.

Above all, eat the produce and have fun using it. What else is a garden for?

Zinnias

If you dream of growing an organic garden, start with zinnias. Butterflies love them! Broad blossoms and bright colors are the order for zinnias along with being one of the easiest and most rewarding flowers to grow. Consider different height, color and shape combinations that will compliment each other.

Some zinnias resemble dahlias or daisies, beehive shapes, button blooms and large floppy blossoms. Zinnias are a quick, easy annual that can be tucked in among perennials or even vegetables to help with pollination.

Zinnias need warm weather to germinate (they originated in Mexico.) The easiest way to start them is to plant the seeds directly where they are to grow. It takes warm soil and 70 degree temperatures to germinate well so wait until the weather warms in spring. Plant them ¼ inch deep in the ground and space them according to size and variety or thin them to let the strongest thrive. Zinnias need air space between them to prevent disease (mostly mildew.) Look for disease resistant varieties to remedy this problem. They like fertile soil so work some compost in before seeding. If you want to get a jump-start on the season, you can start them indoors about a month early but keep in mind they dislike being transplanted. In that case, use peat pots to put directly in the ground after the weather has warmed up.

If you want full, bushy plants and more blooms, pinch the top stems of young plants (yes, I know it's hard to do), but a

little "tough love" will reward you later on in the season. Harvesting zinnias for cut flowers will encourage more blooms all season long. Cut the stems above a leaf or bud node and the stems will keep growing and produce new blooms. For heirloom varieties, let one or two go to seed and collect them for next year.

Butterfly Bush

Buddleja davidii

Are you wondering what to do with that butterfly bush? There are two methods to use.

1 Don't prune them in the fall. You can remove flower heads but leave the stem intact. When new growth appears on the dormant buds in spring, prune just above the buds. How simple is that?

2 Prune them back to 12 to 18 inches. You can do this in early spring. When new buds appear in May or June, prune these buds and you will get side shoots, more blooms and a neater appearance.

If a very cold winter occurs, butterfly bush will die back to the ground and is treated like an herbaceous perennial.

Butterfly bushes like well-drained soil, so don't mulch them heavily which will hold onto spring moisture. They are a little late to start in spring, so have patience.

Butterfly bushes come in purple, pink, blue, white, and yellow and are hardy in USDA zones 5-9. They like full sun, at least 6 hours and slightly acidic soil, 6 to 6.5 PH. Medium moisture is good and no need to fertilize, just lay on some compost in the spring.

The spent flower spikes of butterfly bush should be removed after flowering to stimulate new blooms right up to frost, and this also eliminates the chance of self-seeding. Butterfly bush grows rapidly and can be pruned all the way to the ground each spring to stimulate new growth and flowering.

In some areas of the U.S. butterfly bush is considered a non-native invasive plant that takes over native plant areas. Check with your local extension office before deciding to plant. In Northeast Ohio just remove unwanted plants.

Butterfly bushes were first brought to England from Asia in 1774 by the botanist Adam Buddle (for whom the plant was named.) New natural varieties are still being discovered in remote areas of China and the Himalayas.

Because of its invasiveness, gardeners are recommended to choose newer non-seeding varieties. Oregon is one of several states where a standard butterfly bush is outlawed as a dangerous invasive.

Sometimes it seems plants we thought were native and local turn out to be non-native and invasive.

Here are just a few of the seedless varieties available; Buddleia 'Asian Moon', B 'Blue Chip', B 'Ice Chip', B 'Purple Haze'. Also, the "FlutterBy Grande" trademark has some seedless varieties.

There are no native North American species of butterfly bush, all came from the mountainous regions of China.

Various native milkweeds are better choices for North American natural gardens.