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How To Ensure Early Bulbs Bloom, Year After Year

By James Kilkelly

I often notice when visiting gardens the great quantities of Daffodils and other early bulbs that we plant to herald in the spring. But how do we ensure we have a great display each year?

The early flowering bulbs

Quite a few seasoned gardeners have had their first horticultural "experience" by the planting of a few Daffodil or Tulip bulbs, thus spurring them onto more adventurous plantings. At the end of April the very early flowering bulbs will come to the end of their blooming season. This group of early bloomers includes Daffodils, Hyacinths, Bluebells, Crocus, Snowdrops and early Tulips. All these bulbs will flower well for any gardener the first growing season but for them to bloom well the following seasons we must give them some care.

Dieback not tieback

All bulbs leaves must be allowed a minimum of six weeks after flowering to die down, so if these bulbs are planted in a lawn that area of lawn must remain uncut for six weeks. Refrain from tying your Daffodil leaves in knots to neaten their appearance, also avoid folding them over and securing with rubber bands. If the bulbs leaves are naturally allowed to die back then they will take in the energy for next years flowering. I would also recommend nipping off the spent flower heads on bulbs once flowering is finished, this will prevent the bulb using vital energy for seed production instead using all that energy to bulk up its food store for next season.

Don't forget to feed

The final tip for blooming bulbs next spring is to feed your bulbs, this is especially important if you have a hungry soil. Apply a foliar feed to the fully emerged leaves before the blooms start to form. Choose a general purpose liquid feed. I would also advise you to feed your bulbs just as the blooms have faded with a granular bulb fertiliser applied around the bulbs base. This is the most important feed they will receive. Ensure this feed has a higher potassium or potash content than nitrogen content. Apply according to the manufacturers instructions and heed safety warnings.

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James Kilkelly runs a professional garden design service in Galway, Ireland. He has a regular gardening column in a Irish regional newspaper. Visit his website at

<http://www.gardenplansireland.com/>

He also regularly posts his expert advice on

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Original article:

<http://www.gardenplansireland.com/articles/article13.html>

Guaranteed Gladioli, Summer Colour That Returns

By James Kilkelly

Would you like a summer bedding plant that you do not have to renew year after year? Well by planting hybrid Gladiolus corms, you can attain mid to late summer colour year after year with only occasional renewal.

Colourful blooms

Sometimes called gladioli bulbs (more correctly gladioli corms), these South African members of the Iris family are ideal for colour impact. Most garden centres stock gladioli in whites, pinks, oranges, reds (best for impact), bicolour and the rare blue flowered varieties.

Planting

Most Gladiolus flowers last approx 2 to 3 weeks, so if you're sneaky and stagger your plantings at weekly intervals you can stretch out the length of time they will be in bloom. Plant from the start of April till the end of May in an area that receives upwards of 4 hours of sunlight a day. Plant the bulbs 4 to 5 inches deep (10 to 12cm) and at an approximate spacing of 4 inches, ideally your soil will be rich with free drainage to prevent rotting of the bulb over winter. Group the bulbs in clusters of 5 or more of the same colour for impact, except in a cottage garden where the mixing up of Gladiolus colours is quite acceptable. It is advisable to water well in dry weather as the foliage can be extremely thirsty. Look after the cultivation requirements and you will be rewarded by sword-like leaves topped by trumpet or funnel shaped flowers in vertical rows which bloom from the bottom upwards. The sword-like leaves inspires the Latin name Gladiolus which means little sword, in fact some people refer to them as sword lilies.

Flower arranging uses

Gladiolus flowers can be cut for indoor arrangements by using 3 to 5 different colours bunched together, just be careful not to remove all the leaves from the bulb as this will severely weaken its

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bloom next season.

Miniature hybrids

When purchasing your Gladiolus bulbs in the garden centre ask for Primulinus or miniature hybrids as these varieties grow to about 2ft (0.6 metre) and do not require staking like some of the larger varieties.

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