

## They're Glad They Grow Gladiolus

If you're looking for a specialty crop to grow on a few acres, you might want to consider raising gladiolus. Burt and Carla Scripture of Motley, Minn., have discovered a good market for the colorful blooms at \$1/stem at area farmers markets.

"The colors on glads don't clash with anything. They blend in with any color scheme and are easy to decorate with," says Burt Scripture. "Our glads don't look like the ones you find in a floral shop or grocery store. They are more varied in color, bigger and a lot fresher."

They're varied because the Scriptures grow more than 1,200 varieties on three acres, with about 100,000 plants.

They're bigger because the root stock, called "corms", are purchased from quality suppliers in the U.S. and Europe. While \$1.50 will buy a good corm, Scripture notes that they purchase many corms in the \$7 to \$9 range. In a couple of years each corm can multiply to 25 to 30 corms.

The glads are fresher because the Scriptures cut them when just two of the 18 to 26 blooms on the plant have opened up. The stem will continue to bloom for a week. Carla goes to 3 or 4 farmers markets starting about the first of August to sell the glads. She also ships them overnight to customers out of the local area.

Florists are another potential market,

Scripture says. When the couple first started growing flowers in 1993, they had planned to grow flower varieties to dry and sell to florists. As they contacted potential customers, one florist said he was more interested in buying fresh glads. The couple took his advice and switched to glads and sold to a few florists initially. Carla has also sold glads to area brides for weddings.

Planting and harvesting are the most labor intensive. Scripture uses a pre-emergent herbicide and spaces 3 to 4 corms every foot and plants them 6 in. deep with a potato planter in rows 38 in. apart. He uses a disc tiller for even more support for the stalks and cultivates until the glads get too tall.

"Water is the biggest issue. If you've got water, you can grow glads in sand. They take very little fertilizer," Scripture says. He uses drip irrigation to make sure the glads get an inch of water a week.

The biggest corms bloom first and varieties have different maturity dates to stretch the season from early August to freeze-up in Minnesota.

Scripture says glads are fairly hardy. Occasionally he treats for thrips (insects), but he's never had an issue with wind because most stems are cut before they are in full bloom.

Harvest is time consuming. Before freeze up, the plants are loosened with a fork and



**Burt and Carla Scripture have discovered a good market for gladiolus at area farmers markets. They grow more than 1,200 varieties on 3 acres, with about 100,000 plants.**

pulled out by hand. The corms are separated from the stem, rinsed off and spread to dry for two to three weeks before being stored in a building kept at 40 degrees through the winter.

Selling glads sets them apart from other farmers market vendors, Scripture says. Plus they've noticed a couple of other benefits.

"Hummingbirds love them," Scripture says. "I've seen eight pairs at once."

Scripture, who also keeps bees, adds that bees gather pollen from the glads in the fall.

He suggests that people interested in

growing glads attend the Minnesota Gladiolus Society State Show at the Brown County Free Fair in New Ulm, Minn., Aug. 10-11.

"They'll see half a hockey arena filled with gladiolus and arrangements," says Scripture, adding that glads also fill 2 rooms of the horticulture building at the Minnesota State Fair.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Burt and Carla Scripture, 33710 Timberlane Rd., Motley, Minn. 56466 (ph 218 352-9202; burtsbees@brainerd.net).

## Daylily Farm About More Than Profit

By Dee Goerge, Contributing Editor

If profits were Sandra Dunn's only interest, she would sell all her daylilies online. Keeping regular business hours for people to come to her rural Dansville, Mich., farm is not as economically efficient. But it gives her joy to see her teenage staff interact with customers meandering through 1,400 daylilies. Her business name, Along the Fence Daylilies, captures the neighborly country atmosphere that is important to Dunn.

Dunn sells daylilies on the Internet, at large farmers markets, and on-site. Customers stroll through rows of flowers and flag varieties they want. Then, while they wait in a shaded pavilion with plenty of daylily information to read, Dunn or a worker carefully digs up divisions of each selection, washes the soil off and labels them. On-site customers typically choose the least expensive varieties (\$5 to \$15), while online shoppers are often serious collectors interested in more expensive plants such as Smooth Sailing Along the Way or Genni's Lovin' Oven for \$50 each.

The heart of the business stems from Dunn's collector personality and her love for daylilies.

"They are like little pieces of art to me," she says. She collected her "floral art," until one day she realized she had 400 different varieties.

In 2008, the special education teacher decided to turn her hobby into a part-time summer business. One of her objectives was to involve nieces, nephews and teens from her church to help them gain an understanding and appreciation for agriculture. Adult family members and neighbors are involved in the daylily farming as well.

"We do hybridizing just to get the kids aware of flower shape and differences. I require that they cross pollinate at least six different varieties and specifically say what they are trying to improve about the plants

they are crossing," Dunn says. The hands-on work and interaction with each other has enhanced their knowledge when helping customers.

"I have three goals: great customer service, quality plants with big root systems and that customers feel a little respite here," she says. A trip to her farm is often "\$5 daylily therapy" to mark an event, Dunn says. Some are sad like the anniversary of a death or news of breast cancer. Others are more festive, such as a 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary, when teens gave the couple the plant "Timeless Romance" as a gift.

Dunn opens her farm to visitors Thursday-Saturday between July 4 and the middle of August. Monday through Wednesday, she and her staff are busy mulching, weeding and doing maintenance chores. In addition, she schedules garden talks and events such as free outings for people from assisted living facilities or with Alzheimer's from Monday-Wednesday. Teen staff members walk one-on-one with the guests through the garden and give them undivided attention. Dunn considers community service as her "fourth market."

Besides being beautiful with creative names like the yellow-green and maroon "Autumn Jewels" or the red-accented white "Cherub's Kiss," daylilies are easy to grow and maintain, Dunn says.

They need 6 hrs. of sun a day and grow in sandy to clay soil. Dunn uses mulch to keep the weeds in check in her 5-ft. wide rows of plants. A dose of Milorganite fertilizer in the center of each plant division in the spring helps the plants thrive and keeps away deer during the bloom season.

For people considering growing flowers for a business, Dunn offers advice. Meet with someone who's run a similar business, check into zoning and other legal issues (something co-owner Mary Ann Cleary takes care of), and wear sunscreen for long days of work outside.



**Sandra Dunn sells daylilies on the internet, at large farmers markets, and on-site. Customers stroll through rows of flowers and flag varieties they want.**



**The heart of the business stems from Dunn's collector personality and her love for daylilies.**

Dunn notes that it would be a more profitable business if she just did internet sales and understands why so many other growers have made that choice. For her, however, meeting customers in person and watching them enjoy her acre of flowers is just as important.

For those interested in seeing the varieties she has, Dunn suggests going to [www.fotki.com/flamingo2011](http://www.fotki.com/flamingo2011), which contains photo

albums of her flowers. For those who happen to be in the area this summer, she welcomes them to stop in for an even better look.

Contact: FARM SHOW Followup, Along the Fence Daylilies, 3035 Parman Rd., Dansville, Mich. 48819 (ph 517 449-7368; Facebook: Along the Fence Daylilies).