

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 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



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.

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.

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Pennsylvania Grazer Replaces His Corn Harvester With Cows

"We sold our corn picker and combine, and that forced us to feed our livestock more cheaply. We're just a small farm with 205 acres, so it didn't make sense to own that equipment," says Russ Wilson, Tionesta, Penn.

Wilson Land and Cattle Company in Pennsylvania pastures multiple species of animals including cattle, sheep, hogs and poultry. Their goal is sustainable farming using innovative techniques, such as reducing inputs by using livestock as harvesters and keeping soil covered year round for better soil health.

Wilson has made a number of presentations to share what he's learned from grazing corn and winter crops during the winter, and explains why it makes sense: it saves time and money; it produces better feed and more pounds per acre of feed; it results in

healthier livestock; and soil health is improved.

The bottom line is particularly impressive. With 9 1/2 acres of corn planted to cover crops last winter, Wilson saved \$5,744.49. That doesn't count the nutrient value added to the soil by the cover crop, which an agronomist has estimated at \$2,197.

"In order for small farms to survive, we need to farm with fewer inputs," says Wilson.

Some people question how many ears of corn get trampled into the soil. But Wilson says cows are very good at harvesting all the corn. He once offered visitors \$100 for every ear of corn left by his cows, but none were found.

He's pleased with the overall body condi-



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Wilson Land and Cattle Co. wanted to farm with fewer inputs, so they sold their corn picker and combine and now let cattle graze corn during the winter.

tion and health of his cattle. "We've had no health problems, and our cattle maintained or gained weight while grazing standing corn and cover crops," he says.

He avoids pesticides and herbicides on his farm, and recommends others who do use them to always check the labels. Some herbicides require waiting 60 to 90 days after herbicide application before the land can be grazed.