



Gladiolus Topiary Design

for the
Professional Florist



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EXTENSION

Gladioli are elegant yet versatile flowers. As flower fashions come and go, gladioli—often referred to as “glads” in the floral trade—are typically reserved for church and funeral floral designs. This may be due to their showy qualities, as they are large and colorful flowers with a high perceived dollar value. An unfortunate truth is that we as florists relegate them for use in those categories and do not showcase them for other designs or occasions.

Glads deserve a second look! They are available in numerous colors, both active (violet, red, orange, yellow, lime) and passive (white, pink, peach, mauve, lavender), making them an ideal floral material when selecting color palettes. Exercise your color-combining work in monochromatic, analogous, or complementary schemes, and think of glads as the missing key to your designs.

Gladiolus is a classical line flower with a strong spike form. It provides structure to designs, creating the skeleton into which mass and filler flowers can be combined.

The line-mass continuum theory in floral design describes the melding of Eastern Ikebana (line designs) with the voluminous styles of old Europe (mass designs) creating line-mass in the center. Line-mass designs are typically based on pyramid forms, whether symmetrical or asymmetrical. When creating a line-mass design, an efficient order of flower placements includes establishing the design’s structure first with linear flowers, followed by rounded, mass flowers, and finishing with filler materials. Linear flowers provide structure, mass flowers form the muscle, and filler flowers connect the diverse materials to create the overall form. This is one of the first techniques a professional floral designer must learn.

Adventuresome floral designers can use gladioli to create numerous types of floral designs, including flowers to wear, flowers to carry, table centerpieces, and many more. In the summer months, their wholesale price is significantly lower than during the spring and fall, especially if purchased in quantity. Glads are more abundant on the domestic market and are often grown by small, local farms. Discuss special pricing with your wholesale flower suppliers, then incorporate these spectacular flowers in unexpected ways into your designs.

One way to use gladioli in a unique way is found in this topiary design. This arrangement would be perfect for a party or event. Instead of the usual low centerpiece, why not place one of these on a round table? Two to four of them would look stunning on an oblong table for a seated dinner or buffet service. A matching pair placed on a fireplace mantel is sure to bring attention and positive feedback to your floral business.

A regular “grower’s bunch” is typically 10 stems. We used five glad stems in this featured design. An important feature to this design is to allow the florets to open, providing numerous blooms. Use refrigeration as a tool to control the stages of opening. Leave the flowers out of the cooler to open at their own rate of speed. As the stems blossom, they can be moved to refrigeration to hold them at a particular point.

We feel this design is noteworthy because it takes so little material to create an impactful design. The globe-shaped topiary is a classic, and, like elegant gardens, stone castles, and moonlight, it never goes out of style.



Topiary Materials

Five stems 'White Prosperity' or other gladiolus variety, fresh flower foam, waterproof tape, 2- to 3-inch wired wood picks, cube container, decorative stones. You will also need a floral knife and floral shears or sharp pruning shears.



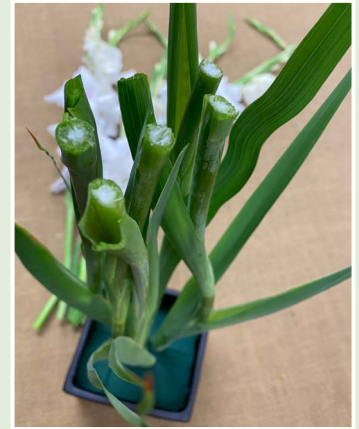
Topiary Base

Place hydrated fresh flower foam snugly within the container. This cube container's height left about 1 inch of space from the top of the foam.



Gather Stems

Next, gather the gladioli stems together at a proportional length of about twice the height of the container.



Cut the Stems

Using floral or pruning shears, cut the stems at the gathering point. Set the flowering portion of the stems aside.



Tape the Stems

Bind the plain cut stems just below the cut point with waterproof tape.



Trim the Stems

Trim the top of the bound stems so that they form a point in the center. It is fine to use floral shears or pruners for this step, but it is best to use a knife to cut flower stems that are inserted into fresh flower foam. Set the stem/container unit aside.



Create a Foam Ball

Taking a piece of fresh flower foam, sculpt it into a spherical shape using a floral knife.

This unit uses about one-sixth of the block of floral foam. Note that manufacturers often score standard size foam bricks into halves and thirds, so use those lines to avoid cutting away an abundance of foam.

Wrap waterproof tape in a continuous band around the foam ball, making a cage. This cage adds support and resiliency to the sphere. Do not add too much tape. Leave room for stem placements to enter the foam. The tape will attach to itself, not the wet foam, so be sure to overwrap it to itself.

Note that this design stretches fresh flower foam to nearly the breaking point; therefore, you may need to practice this design a few times to perfect your techniques. Give yourself grace if you need to remake the mechanics; no one is born with the ability to create perfect mechanics at every attempt.



Pike the Ball

Once the caged ball of foam is finished, press it onto the gladiolus stem unit. Be sure to have something absorbent on hand and watch for water spills on the floor. This step should result in a relatively secure bond between the foam ball and the stems. This step makes a large hole in the foam ball. If the connection seems loose, it is often best to restart this step with a new ball of foam.



Rigid Stems

The next phase of this design creation involves adding gladiolus florets to the topiary ball. Cut florets from the stem, keeping stem segments intact. If you merely remove the florets and try to use them as placements, you will find that the base of the flower is much too weak for floral foam insertion. It is important to leave the florets attached to the parent stem. The stem is rigid and will stay in place once inserted into the foam.



Stem Insertions

Think of this ball as a world globe. Make multiple insertions of the glad stem segments into the foam ball. Your first placement should be near the South Pole, while your second placement should be near the North Pole. Add floral stem segments around the equator in a zigzag pattern. It is a good habit to step back from your work, so that you can see the overall pattern of the design. Note that a common pitfall with this design is too few flowers at the lower third of the sphere. If this design is used as a table centerpiece, the guests will see non-decorative mechanics rather than beautiful gladiolus florets.



Foliage Accents

Go back to the stems and foliage that were set aside, and gather and form individual leaves into loops. These can be bound together using a wired wood pick. Gladiolus foliage can last a long time without water; therefore, it is not necessary for it to directly contact the foam. Distribute the foliage loops to cover the non-decorative floral foam ball and to bring crisp green color to the sphere.



Finished Design

Once the design is complete, add decorative stones to the base of the design, covering the foam. Add water to the container just above the layer of stones so that their color appears saturated. In general, it is best to avoid adding flowers or unnecessary decoration to the base of the design. It detracts from the design appearing as a trained plant. We added a line of ribbon under the container to repeat the color white at the base of the design. Consider a scattering of votive candles around the design's base for an evening event.

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