

# The "Glad" Farm

Oh, yes! How well I remember our "glads." What a job it was to change the water every day on the ones in tubs at home for selling locally! And when there was a funeral our dining-table became a florist work shop as mother, stuffed wire frames with moss, wrapped in <sup>strips of</sup> green florist paper, then string to hold in place, ~~soaked in water~~, and mixed blossoms and greenery ~~to be used making~~ funeral arrangements. The finished product was then soaked in bath tub to absorb water ~~to~~ to keep the flowers fresh. There was little eating and no bathing while this was going on. Mother was so good at this people very seldom ordered arrangements from Mobile when we had flowers for Mother to work with. And it was a lot of work, but Mother enjoyed it because ~~she~~ Daddy let her keep the money!

We all loved the glads and had to check each one Daddy out to bring to the house. If there was too much color showing because they'd opened too much overnight, or if it was a new variety and he wanted to observe, or if there were weak spikes or not at least one dozen ~~of~~ of a variety, the spikes were cut and brought to the house to sell. Little Bet especially loved the glads - she named her favorite "Pretty Girl Going to Sunday School" and always recognized it even if <sup>there was</sup> just one in

an armload.

One year toward the end of the season when it got so hot and the best specimens were bloomed out, Daddy invited the public to come out to the fields and buy glads for 10¢ a dozen! People just flocked out there ~~for~~ ~~glads~~! When it was all over, so were the glads — people just wouldn't wait for someone who knew how to cut the flowers for them, and just pulled up plants and bulbs and all, and then broke off the flowers. Daddy was almost in tears when he ~~to~~ saw how many ~~of~~ bulbs had been ruined.

New bulbs "make" after the blooming season. Bulbs had to be harvested, keeping each variety separate, dried in flats with wire bottoms so air can circulate, and then ~~just~~ cleaned and graded. Cleaning bulbs became a prized job for a group of senior black <sup>women</sup> who were too old or crippled to walk into town for a job as cook or ~~housework~~, but our house in the country was more accessible and they could sit all day, <sup>in the shade of the pecan trees and</sup> visit with friends ~~with~~ as they cleaned bulbs. They came early because they knew ~~the~~ our cook, Bessie, always cooked enough grits for R. D. Hazel and Lucie, to have some left over for them. There'd be six, eight, maybe 10, working at a time, and they were sorry to see all the bulbs and



**FIELD GROWN IN ALABAMA** — These beautiful gladioli (top left), products of the Vail Farm in Baldwin County, are beautiful enough to decorate for a queen or a bride. R. B. Vail (top right), who made a profitable hobby of the growing of gladioli, inspects the packed hamper of flowers getting a last drink of water before the express ride to points east. Johnny Vail (bottom left) tends his roadside flower stand where magnificent blooms are sold to tourists for 25 cents a dozen. Tom Vail (bottom right) stands at the edge of the seven and a half acre gladioli farm a mile out of Bay Minette where about 400,000 plants are grown.

# Decorations By The Acre On Baldwin Farm

## Harvest Of Flowers Reaped On Farm Of R. B. Vail

By SUE F. TURNER

BEAUTY may appear petal deep in gladioli but the source of it is found by following experiments with the bulbs during 50 years in American soil. A basket of gladioli is admired, four and five foot stems drooping under the weight of ten to 24 opening florets on the flower head in velvety reds, taffeta whites, changeable peach, yellow, orchid, smoky pink, black, brown with red throats, and rare blue. If there is any curiosity, the natural question is, "How did they get that way?"

This plant, that has no rival but the rose in popularity, originated in Africa and Eurasia and was brought to America by Childs of New York fifty years ago. His cultivation of the plant, then considered remarkable, was a midget compared with the 360 species now perfected.

R. B. Vail, down in Baldwin County at Bay Minette, a man prominent in State affairs, newspaper circles, past president of the Alabama Chapter of the National Association of Postmasters, and present postmaster in his home town, raised the first field grown gladioli for use in the East from Baldwin County and probably the State, in 1927.

His is the usual case of a hobby that had a small beginning and outgrew itself. The original bulbs came from his back yard in Birmingham 20 years ago. Now 7-1-2 acres are planted in 50,000 bulbs to the acre.

Only in recent years has the gladioli become a popular field grown plant. It is a responsive flower and all varieties do well in any soil with average care. The most important factor is giving them water at the proper time.

The bulbs are graded in six sizes from a quarter to an inch and a half and are planted in rows, separated according to species, the distance between the bulbs being a space the size of the bulb. Sixty to 110 days are required from planting to blooming time. Six weeks after the bulbs are planted the florets form, those separate green folds on the flower head that develop into deep, six-petaled flowers. It is very necessary that the plants get a quantity of water at this time and again three weeks before the blooms are to open. At this time the bud makes its appearance at the base of the stalk. It is a hard swelling that can be felt with the fingers while the upper part of the stalk is soft and hollow. This bud travels up the stalk and as it makes its appearance at the florets, they begin to open and appear two and three at the time until the entire flower head blooms.

### In The White House

The success of grower Vail's gladioli is attested by the fact that 125 dozen decorated the White House last year on the event of the visit of King

George and Queen Elizabeth of England. In her column, Mrs. Roosevelt commented on the unusual and rare blue specimen which Vail took care to provide as many as his farm would furnish.

This blue, which is a purplish shade, is one of the recent perfections of the hybridists who are also making headway developing an odor in the flower. Already this has been obtained in a pink and scarlet gladioli that has a cinnamon smell. A woman grower in Ohio has developed one with an incense odor. In Vail's farm declares that a dozen varieties have definite and distinct odor.

Foremost hybridists in the perfecting of this magnificent bloom are A. E. Kuntred of Goshen, Indiana, and Palmer of Toronto, Canada. This latter developed the number one gladioli, the Pleardy, which Farmer Vail says he has grown as a six-foot stalk with 30 florets that measured seven inches across.

The Vail farm ships some 5,000 hampers every season from May 20 to July 1. These plants are cut before blooming begins, leaving three sheath-like leaves for the protection of the newly developing bulb. These average 22 dozen to the hamper the number depending on the length of the spike, length of the flower head and the number of florets.

### Plethous Harvest

Twenty to 30 men cut the plants early in the morning and late in the afternoon every day of the week for shipment twice a day. The color is barely showing on the tips of the low-

est florets. These are tied in dozens and put stem-end down in a four-foot hamper that is put in a tub of water for a last drink and sprinkled freely before being sent to the station where it will travel by express to Detroit, Chicago, New York and Baltimore.

The Vail family has six children

and two granddaughters who mingle with the cutting and packing of the gladioli and admire and exclaim over the colors. Young Tom, some 14 years, knows the species by sight. Mother Macree, his favorite, is a smoky pink; the giant Pleardy, his second choice; with other beauties as White Butterfly, Orange Butterfly, Red Splendor, Gold Eagle, Maid of Orleans, Vaagabond Prince.

Johnny, his younger brother, is much more interested in selling a dozen for a quarter no matter what color they are if the tourists like them. He does a good business at his roadside shed.

The field, though never allowed many blooms, is still a wonder. The colors are separated in these rows and in the Fall the bulbs are dug, packed in sacks and labeled. The old bulb has spent itself and developed a husk; the newly developed bulb which grows between the stalk and the old bulb, has a shell. In the Spring these new bulbs are put into a new plot of ground so that their species will not be confused with any volunteers in the old field which is so necessary in shipping definite species and colors to the markets before the bloom identifies it.

This past winter 16,000 pounds of bulbs were shipped to Florida by the Vails to a planter in the Keys. Florida puts out blooming gladioli in December. Rex Beach down there planted 10 million bulbs his first crop. Alabama has other growers in Baldwin, Mobile, Birmingham and Wetumpka.

The versatile Mr. Vail uses his spare time collecting airmail stamps and growing a rare African daisy, called Gerbera. Gladioli is his first love, however, and if his instructions for the care of vase flowers are followed the life of the bloom is prolonged. The water must be changed every day, the old florets must be removed, and most important of all a half-inch of the stem must be cut off so that fresh water can be taken in.

cleaned and  
bulletts separated and the job finished.  
One year toward the end of the season when  
we didn't have as many hampers as usual, <sup>to ship</sup>  
Charlie asked Daddy "Why don't I go out  
some fly-catchers, Mr. Bob?" We'll fill up  
another hamper" Daddy said "Well, okay,  
if you want to" So he and RD went out  
the Atmore road, and cut arms full of the  
wild fly-catchers. Several days later Daddy  
got a telegram, "Send 50 dozen SARACENA."  
Now what is a Saracena? Even my daddy  
had to look that up in the dictionary! It was  
our wild fly-catchers! I think we got permission  
to cut one more time, but couldn't do that on  
a regular basis.

It was a busy time with everybody growing  
up, and Daddy was so busy with The Baldwin  
Times, the picture shows, the post office (have  
I said he was Post Master?) and the glads,  
and with his health not the best, he <sup>\*</sup>finally  
sold all his bulletts and bulletts, and that  
remarkable endeavor was over - but never  
their love of flowers.

\* and mother talked it over and he used  
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