



A colourful bunch of Gladiolus



White Gladiolus



Red and white Gladiolus

# Gladiolus the sword flower

**G**ladiolus from Latin is the diminutive of *gladius*, a sword and is a genus of perennial bulbous flowering plants in the iris family (*Iridaceae*). Sometimes called the sword lily, the most widely-used English common name for these plants is simply *gladiolus* sometimes called the *gladiolus*.

The genus is distributed in Mediterranean Europe, Asia, Tropical Africa and South Africa. However, the center of diversity of the genus is located in the Cape Floristic Region, where most species were discovered. As a matter of fact, 163 out of the 250 species of *Gladiolus* are from Southern Africa. The genera *Oenostachys*, *Hemoglossum*, *Anomalesia* and *Acidanthera*, traditionally considered independent entities, currently are included in *Gladiolus*.

The genus *Gladiolus* contains about 260 species, of which 250 are native to sub-Saharan Africa, mostly South Africa. About 10 species are native to Eurasia. There are 160 species of *Gladiolus* endemic in southern Africa and 76 in tropical Africa. The species vary from very small to the spectacular giant flower spikes in commerce.

These attractive, perennial herbs are semi-hardy in temperate climates. They grow from rounded, symmetrical corms that are enveloped in several layers of brownish, fibrous tunics. These flowers are variously colored, pink to reddish or light purple with white, contrasting markings, or white to cream or orange to red.

Their stems are generally unbranched, producing one to nine narrow, sword-shaped, longitudinally grooved leaves,

enclosed in a sheath. The lowest leaf is shortened to a cataphyll. The leaf blades can be plane or cruciform in cross section.

The fragrant flower spikes are large and one-sided, with secund, bisexual flowers, each subtended by 2 leathery, green bracts. The sepals and the petals are almost identical in appearance, and are termed tepals. They are united at their base into a tube-shaped structure. The dorsal tepal is the largest, arching over the three stamens. The outer three tepals are narrower.

**Kingdom:** Plantae  
**(unranked):** Angiosperms  
**(unranked):** Monocots  
**Order:** Asparagales  
**Family:** Iridaceae  
**Subfamily:** Ixoidae  
**Tribe:** Ixioideae  
**Genus:** *Gladiolus*

The perianth is funnel-shaped, with the stamens attached to it. The style has three filiform, spoon-shaped branches, each expanding towards the apex.

The ovary is 3-lobed with oblong or globose capsules, containing many, winged brown, longitudinally dehiscent seeds.

In their center must be noticeable the specific pellet like structure which is the real seed without the fine coat. In some seeds this structure is wrinkled and with black color. These seeds are unable to germinate.

The South African species were originally pollinated by long-tongued anthophorine bees, but some changes in the pollination system have occurred, allowing pollination by sunbirds, noctuid and sphingid moths, long-tongued flies and several others. In the temperate zones of Europe many of the

hybrid large flowering sorts of gladiolus can be pollinated by small well-known wasps. Actually, they are not very good pollinators because of the large flowers of the plants and the small size of the wasps.

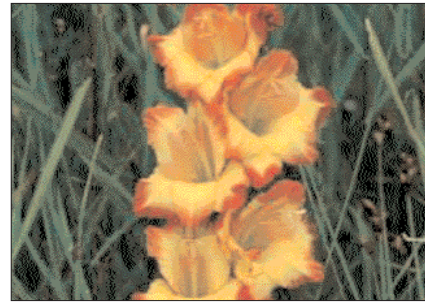
Another insect in this zone which can try some of the nectar of the gladioli is the best-known European Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum* which usually pollinates many famous garden flowers like *Petunia*, *Zinnia*, *Dianthus* and others. Gladioli are used as food plants by the larvae of some Lepidoptera species including the Large Yellow Underwing.

Gladioli have been extensively hybridized and a wide range of ornamental flower colours are available from the many varieties. The main hybrid groups have been obtained by crossing between four or five species, followed by selection, *Grandiflorus*, *Primalines* and *Nanus*. They make very good cut flowers. However, due to their height, the cultivated forms frequently tend to fall over in the wind if left on the plant.

In temperate zones, the corms of most species and hybrids should be lifted in autumn and stored over winter in a frost-free place, then replanted in spring. Some species from Europe and high altitudes in Africa, as well as the small 'Nanus' hybrids, are much hardier (to at least -150F/-260C) and can be left in the ground in regions with sufficiently dry winters.

Plants are propagated either from small cormlets produced as offsets by the parent corms, or from seed; in either case, they take several years to get to flowering size.

Source: Wikipedia



Yellow Gladiolus



Pink Gladiolus



Purple Gladiolus

## World's smallest crocodiles brought to Sri Lanka Fifteen Albino baby snakes hatch

DEMI HEWAMANNA

The Dehiwela Zoological Gardens welcome three of the world's smallest crocodiles, better known as Dwarf Crocodiles from the Leipzig Zoo in Germany under the Animal Exchange Program.

The Dwarf crocodile (*Osteoleaemus tetraspis*) also known as *Kuru Kimbila* in Sri Lanka, is an African species of crocodile. It is also the smallest extant crocodile species in the world. Recent sampling has identified three genetically distinct populations.

The Dwarf crocodiles attain a medium adult length of 1.5 meters (5 feet), though the maximum recorded length for this species is 1.9 meters (6.2 feet). Adults are a uniform black on their backs and sides with a yellowish underside with black patches. Juveniles have a lighter brown banding on body and tails and yellow patterns on the head.

As a result of its small size and heightened vulnerability to predation, this species of crocodile have a heavily armoured neck, back and tail and also has osteoderms on its belly and underside of neck. *Osteoleaemus* has a blunt short snout, as long as it is wide, similar in fact to that

of a dwarf caiman, probably a result of occupying a similar ecological niche. The dentition consists of four premaxillary teeth, 12 to 13 on the maxilla and 14 to 15 on the dentary bone.

Dwarf crocodiles range across tropical lowland regions of sub-Saharan West Africa and West Central Africa. The subspecies *tetraspis* is found mainly in the westerly reaches of this range while *Osborni* is restricted to the Democratic Republic of Congo's rain forest.

*Osteoleaemus* individuals



Lovely to look but deadly to touch



The Dwarf crocodiles

reside in permanent ponds in swamps and areas of slight current of rain forest rivers, though reports exist of dwarf crocodiles in isolated pools in the savannah, where burrows are dug to aestivate during the dry season.

### Behaviour

The dwarf crocodile is a slow, timid and mainly nocturnal reptile. As with all crocodilians, it is an adept predator of vertebrates, large invertebrates such as crustaceans and when presented with the opportunity, also eats carrion. Foraging

is mainly done in or near the water, though in areas with substantial ground cover, they may expand their feeding pattern to land in extensive forays, especially following rains.

The Congo Basin subspecies demonstrates seasonality in its dietary regime, feeding on fish during the wet season's floods. When faced with the scarceness of food during the dry season, individuals turn to crustaceans and food intake is generally reduced.

True to its solitary, nocturnal nature, a dwarf crocodile digs out a burrow to hide in and rest during the day, which can sometimes have a submerged entrance. An individual lacking the right conditions to do so usually abides between tree roots that hang over the ponds in which it lives. In exchange for these small crocodiles, Sri Lanka gave two of the country's Giant Squirrels.

The Zoo also welcomed 15 new Albino baby snakes as out of the 16 eggs that the white Cobra laid, 15 of them hatched last week. So to everyone who loves snakes as well as crocodiles or any type of reptile, well what you waiting for...go ahead and check them out!



The 15 Albino baby snakes



The proud parents. Pix by Suranpith Perera, Dehiwela, Mount Lavinia Corr

## Tommy and Gilly need homes



Tommy and Gilly are loving and affectionate dogs who need loving homes. Tommy the brown colour dog was abandoned by his owners because he is going blind while Gilly's owners have gone abroad leaving him behind. Please call 0777585998 if you would like to give either of them a home



Nari Latha (*Hebaneria Crinifera*) is a rare ground Orchid since the flowers somewhat resemble the human female figure. There are ten species of this genus that occur in the island. Here a bloomed Nari Latha at a garden in the Gothuwa Estate at Baddegama. Somadasa Abeywickrama, Baddegama Group Correspondent.

Please send in your contributions to demid5@gmail.com or features@dailynews.lk

The Associated Newspapers of Ceylon Ltd., at No. 35, D.R.Wijewardene Mawatha, Colombo 10

