

# The Great Gladiolus Contest

By Ann C. Shultz

**W**hen I married my husband five years ago, I became a stepmother to two girls. I was faced with all the doubts every woman wanting to be a good stepmother is faced with. Will we get along? Will they love, or at least accept me? Will I be that stereotypical evil stepmother?

That first year we bought a house and were redoing the backyard. The garden had always been a sanctuary for me, a place to reflect, dream and pray amid the wonder of nature. I was delighted to find my husband loved to garden as well. We spent hours designing and planting our new garden with the flowers, shrubs and trees we had carefully selected.

At the same time, I was looking for ways to connect with my stepdaughters, then ten and twelve.

As we got more comfortable with each other, they began to accompany me on trips to the market and running errands. One day as I was on my way to the nursery, they asked if they could come along.

It was a beautiful winter day. The air was crisp but the sun sparkled on brightly colored rows of ranunculus, stocks, poppies, and pansies. The girls followed behind me as I pushed the cart, taking in the sights and smells around us. But it wasn't until we were in the bulb section of the nursery that they got excited.

"What are these?" they asked me with wonder in their voices as they pointed

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to the bins of gladiolus bulbs. Each bin sported a picture of a different color. I explained that from the tiny brown bulbs planted in winter would grow a glorious spring flower like the one pictured on the box.

Their questions gave me an idea. We would have a gladiolus contest. Each of us would pick a variety of bulbs and then see who had the first shoot, the first flower and the biggest flower. "Who'll judge?" they asked. "How about your dad?" I glibly volunteered my husband.

The girls responded enthusiastically. They carefully pored over their choices and then popped the bulbs into brown bags. I seriously doubt that Michelangelo took more care in selecting his palette before he started the Sistine Chapel.

In the week that followed, we prepared the soil for planting. On the following Saturday, my husband and I showed the girls how to dig the holes, drop the bulb and some bulb booster in and cover with the new soil. Once finished, we labeled the small gardens so we could keep track of each contestant's progress. Every day the girls checked the garden.

My youngest stepdaughter whooped with joy when she spotted the first green shoot in her garden. Soon others appeared and it was just as exciting. Over the weeks, the shoots became willowy green stocks. In May, brilliant flowers appeared just in time for my oldest stepdaughter's backyard graduation party.

Somehow my husband skillfully escaped having to render a final judgment, proclaiming them all "just beautiful."

My stepdaughters are teenagers now. They are busy with friends, school and activities, which is as it should be. But every spring when the gladioluses come up, they always ask me "Do you remember the great gladiolus contest?" And I answer with a smile in my heart "Of course I do."

## Call for Entries

On this page, in each issue of *California Gardener*<sup>TM</sup>, we will print inspiring stories of how gardening touches our lives. We invite you to submit your story or essay of approximately 500 words in length. Send typewritten submissions via email to [gardens@california-gardener.com](mailto:gardens@california-gardener.com), or mail to California Gardener, Suite 200, 2200 East Route 66, Glendora, CA 91740. If your story is chosen for "Gardens That Touch Our Lives" you will be awarded a \$100 gift certificate from Armstrong Garden Centers. **Congratulations to Ann C. Shultz, our first winner. Ann gardens in Dana Point, California.**

