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### *Gladiolus* species

**GLADIOLUS** genus consists of about 300 species of bulbous perennials. Native to Asia Minor, Natal and South Africa, they have flowers of many colours.

It is also known as *Botofufuo* (Twi), *Habb il Qamh* (Maltese), and Sword lily; and in flower language is said to be a symbol of bonds of affection, 'ready and armed', strength of character, and 'you pierce my heart'.

Warning – the bulb can cause vomiting if ingested.

For some Christians this is the plant referred to in the New Testament of the *Bible* as the 'lilies of the field'. It was much in evidence in Israel when Jesus was alive.

From the two species that were being grown in Europe in 1597 there are now about 300 species and hybrids. The plant was introduced to Britain by John Tradescant the Elder (1570-c.1638), the English naturalist, who travelled and then preceded his son as head gardener to Charles I (1600-1649). *Gladiolus* became extremely popular in England during the Victorian and Edwardian eras (the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries).

Medicinally, herbalists used the roots in poultices to draw out foreign bodies from the flesh (such as thorns or splinters) and in some countries, roots mashed with ginger (*Zingiber officinale*) have also been used to treat dysentery. The seeds and seed pods have provided a remedy for wind.

*Gladiolus* is associated with August.