



Amaryllis

Amaryllis add a tropical look to your home and provide some much needed winter color besides gray and dirty snow white. In addition, few indoor plants are as long lasting and easy to care for as amaryllis. Amaryllis are popular gifts and have huge flowers (up to six inches across) in winter. There are normally two to four or more flowers on a twelve to twenty-four inch stalk. Some larger bulbs will even have two stalks of flowers. The ranges of dramatic colors are brilliant red, orange, salmon, pink, white, striped or variegated.

When we get amaryllis bulbs as gifts it seems so easy — just add water and sunlight and watch them grow. The bulbs have already gone through a rest period. The challenge comes after we enjoy the beautiful flowers and then wonder what to do with this huge bulb and its long floppy leaves.

Once the flowers fade, remove the flower stalks but leave the leaves. The leaves will help to replenish the food storage in the bulb. Amaryllis should be grown as a houseplant by watering and fertilizing regularly with a houseplant fertilizer such as 5-10-5 or 5-10-10. In early summer once the danger of frost has passed, I usually put mine outside under a shady tree.

Continue to grow the bulb for 5-6 months after flowering. In order to get amaryllis to bloom in winter they must go through a rest period. It seems amaryllis bulbs have a sleeping beauty complex -- they sleep a long time before they reveal their beauty. Luckily they don't require a kiss from a handsome prince to awaken.

In August, it is time to stop fertilizing and time to gradually reduce watering. After about three weeks, stop watering completely. Let the leaves yellow and die down naturally. Cut the yellow leaves off to a couple of inches above the bulb. In September or early October, set the bulb, pot and all, in a cool (50–60°F), dark, dry place for at least six to eight weeks. The six to eight weeks of rest should not be counted until all the leaves are yellow. I put mine in the basement and forget about them. In November or later, move the potted plant back into a warm bright area and start the growth cycle again by watering. Amaryllis like to be somewhat pot-bound so don't worry about repotting for a couple of years.

Keep the soil moist but not soggy. Don't let the bulb dry out especially once it starts to flower. Rotate the pot daily as it grows so the plant doesn't lean to one side. Ideal temperature is 55–65°F. Warm temperatures promote long, weak and spindly growth. Be patient. The bulb should flower within 4 to 8 weeks from the time you start watering again. The reasons why bulbs fail to bloom include: bulb too young/small; too short a dormant period (the bulbs should be completely dormant with no green leaves); or too high of temperature during or after dormancy.

The longer you have an amaryllis bulb, the bigger the bulb gets and the more flowers so it is worth the little extra effort to keep it year after year.

Growing Amaryllis

So just why do so many people enjoy growing Amaryllis indoors? That's easy! First, they are an easy bulb to grow. Forcing Amaryllis to bloom indoors is a snap. Many garden stores carry them boxed, potted and ready to grow by just adding water. Second, they have big, bright, trumpet shaped blooms cheering up the indoor winter scene. And, third, many people need to grow something during the long winter. For gardeners, winter can be long. Growing indoor plants help us to get through the long off season.

The word Amaryllis comes from the Greek word for "sparkling". And they do just that, brightening up a spring lawn, or adding color indoors on a cold, drab winter's day. Big, cheerful, trumpet shaped blooms come in red, pink, yellow and a few combinations of these colors. A single flower blooms six to eight weeks after planting. Plants can grow up to two feet and can be grown outdoors in frost free areas. They also can be grown in colder regions. In cold regions, pull up the bulbs before winter, and store them until spring.

How to Grow:

Plant bulbs with the upper third above ground in good, rich potting soil, the plant and bloom grows big. Put just one bulb into a six inch or larger pot. Use a container slightly bigger than the circumference of the bulb. They do not need a lot of soil and growing space indoors. The pot should be heavy as the plant can grow up to two feet. It should also have holes in the bottom for drainage. Whether kept indoors or out, your Amaryllis will benefit by as much sunlight as you can provide it with.

Planning on keeping your bulbs? Apply a light dose of fertilizer once or twice, especially after blooming. The bulb stores all the food it needs for this year's bloom. The fertilizer helps the plant store food for next year.

If growing outdoors, plant the bulbs singly, or put two or three together in a group. The flower stalk and flower will emerge first, followed by leaves. Do not cut the plant back until the leaves have yellowed and died. If grown outdoors, provide a layer of mulch to protect them from frost.

If the plant is allowed to grow until the leaves yellow, the bulb will bloom for years. Like other bulbs, the plant needs time to grow and store energy in the bulb for next season. New plants are propagated by separating bulbs or from new seeds. You can promote new seed growth, when the flower blooms, gently hand pollinate the flower. After the plant dies off, you can harvest the seed head. Open the seeds and allow them to dry thoroughly before storing them.



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I have an amaryllis that I was trying to get to re-bloom. I kept it wrapped and out of soil as recommended and later opened the newspaper to find about a dozen little bulbs attached to the original. I guess it's propagating? I planted the whole thing in a pot and its first green shoots are starting to come up. Is there any special care I need to provide--watering, feeding etc, and will I be able to divide the bulbs? The primary bulb seems to be hollow now as if the daughters are going to replace the mother bulb. I have 3 others but this is only happening to one plant and this is only the second year I've tried them and could use some advice.

At this time of the year it is best to plant the bulb outside in the garden in a semi shaded area with very fertile soil and plenty of water. The bulbs will most likely produce foliage. Keep feeding the bulb as much as you can. During the summer growth they really love the rotted cow manure around them. Late September, lift the bulb and cut off all foliage, 2" above the bulb. Let the bulb rest 6 to 8 weeks in a cool dry area, then replot in a container for indoor blooming.

The small bulbs around the mother bulb can be grown to maturity but be prepared that it could take four or five years before they bloom. Sometimes the "mother bulb" does disintegrate during storage – unfortunately I have no solution for that, it's just a thing that sometimes happens.

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