

## The Amazing Amaryllis

The Amaryllis bulbs have become a fixture of Christmas or holiday gift giving for decades. Whether you buy one for yourself or as a gift for someone else, they will last for many years if properly cared for.

Although they will always be Amaryllis to gardeners, the vibrant, large flowering bulb actually belong to the genus *Hippeastrum*. A true Amaryllis is not forced. This is a botanical misunderstanding that began with Linnaeus in the 18th century and continued well into the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the time botanists finally got things sorted out, the name amaryllis was finally attached to the garden hybrids that are the offspring of species originating in Central and South America.

At garden centers and gift stores, you'll find both pre-planted and unspotted bulbs. If you are buying unspotted bulbs, inspect them to make sure there are no soft spots or depressed, reddened areas. The bulbs also should have a number of plump roots. Don't be concerned if an amaryllis bulb has begun to sprout some new growth that looks pale. The growth will green up as soon as you plant the bulb and move it into bright sunlight.

Newly purchased dormant bulbs should be potted in light, but rich potting mix in a pot that has drainage holes and is about four inches wider than the diameter of the bulb. The top third of the bulb should remain above the soil. Be sure not to bury the neck of the bulb. Place the newly potted bulb in a sunny spot. Keep the soil moist but not wet, and don't let the temperature much below 65 degrees. As soon as growth begins, use a liquid fertilizer at recommended strength every one to two weeks. As flower stems emerge and develop they may need staking.

During flower, place the potted Amaryllis in a location with good light and cooler indoor temperatures, in the 60-70 degree range, for maximum bloom. Continue to keep the soil moist but not wet.

After flower, allow emerging leaves to keep growing. Again, keep it moist in a cool, bright spot. Remove the flowers as soon as they begin to fade and look wilted. Nip them off behind the ovary, which is the small bulge immediately next to the flower, where seeds develop. By treating it as a regular houseplant and keeping it green, it helps put energy back into the bulb.

As the weather warms up in the spring, you can put the amaryllis plant outside. Be sure there is no longer the threat of frost. Set the pot outside in the shade to acclimate it to the sun. After a few days, move the pot to a full-sun site for the summer. The entire pot can be set in the ground, or as I do, leave it above ground throughout the summer. Never allow the soil to dry out and continue fertilizing until the middle or end of August.

The amaryllis can stay outside until frost threatens. Move it indoors to a dark location and let it go dormant by not watering. Leave any green or yellowing foliage on the plant until it dies back completely.

After it rests, or is dormant for a period of 8-10 weeks, remove the remaining dead foliage. You can repot the bulb or continue to grow it in the same pot. Water the bulb once and place the pot back in a sunny location. Wait two or three weeks until growth starts, and start watering as needed. New flower stalks and flowers should develop during the winter, anytime from December to March. You can continue this routine for many years with the same beautiful results.

VOICE MAIL: You can leave a question for a volunteer Master Gardener at our NEW PHONE # 651-213-8904 any time of day or night. You can also get your question answered on the web at: [www.extension.umn.edu/askmg](http://www.extension.umn.edu/askmg)

The Chisago County Extension Office is now sharing office space with Veterans Administration in the Senior Center building at 38794 6th Avenue in North Branch.

Plans are underway for our Gardening Bonanza—Town and Country Expo--to be held in North Branch on March 8. Information on our spring events, including the plant sale will be mailed and posted on our website [www.extension.umn.edu/county/chisago/mg](http://www.extension.umn.edu/county/chisago/mg) about Jan. 15.

Submitted by Jerry Vitalis  
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