

Growing Amaryllis Bulbs

Of all flowering bulbs, amaryllis are perhaps some of the easiest to grow. They do well indoors or out and maintain their blooms for several weeks. Originating in South America, the amaryllis provides stunning and attractive choices and in come in a variety of colors. In order to ensure successful and quality blooms, follow these quick tips:

Planting: Amaryllis bulbs like somewhat tight roots and only need about an inch of space around each bulb with about 1/3 of the top sticking out of the soil. If planting only one bulb, plant it in a 6" diameter pot; three bulbs are comfy in a 10-12" pot. Make certain the pot has good drainage holes.

Water: Amaryllis don't require a lot of water. When the top one inch of soil is dry, water it making certain to avoid pouring water directly into the crown of the bulb. As the bulb grows and obtains more roots it may tend to dry out more frequently; just keep your eye on it and make certain it stays somewhat moist.

Fertilizer: To get your Amaryllis a jump-start on blooming and growing, feed it every 2-3 weeks using a slow-release fertilizer or a balanced organic fertilizer.

Light: Place the Amaryllis in a bright window. Turn the pot about a quarter turn each week because the flower stalk is heavy and tends to lean toward the light.

Bloom Care: Although Amaryllis love light, once it begins to bloom, the flowers will last much longer if you remove the plant from direct sunlight and place it in a slightly cooler spot. Stake the flower stalk if it becomes top heavy but make certain not to pierce the bulb.

Remove Spent Flowers: After the Amaryllis blooms fade, gently remove them individually by carefully cutting them. Once the entire flower stalk begins to wilt, cut off the stalk just above where it sprouts from the bulb.

Encourage Foliage: Place your Amaryllis outside for the summer to allow the foliage to continue to grow and feed the bulb in preparation for next year's blooms. Bury the pot up to its rim in mulch, keep it watered regularly, and make certain to continue feeding it every 2-3 weeks.

Cold Storage: The leaves will start to turn yellow and die in early fall. This is a great opportunity to dig up the bulbs and cut off the dead leaves. Make certain to wipe the bulb clean to prepare it for storage up to 6 weeks in a cold, dark spot (40°-50° F). In cooler climates, an unheated shed or garage works well; in warmer climates, simply place your bulbs in the refrigerator. Make certain not to expose your Amaryllis bulb to freezing temperatures.

Container Storage: As an alternative, cut off the dead leaves and leave the Amaryllis bulb in its pot for cold storage, then simply bring the pot back out after about six weeks and resume watering. This works for a low-maintenance option.

Propagating: As your Amaryllis bulb gets older, it may produce little babies (called bulblets) which are attached to the mother bulb. To propagate the bulblets, use a sharp knife to cut them off the mother bulb right before repotting, then plant them individually. The baby bulbs will take several years to flower but keep them on the same care schedule as the mother.

Bloom Failure: It can be tricky to get an Amaryllis to rebloom. If yours does not bloom this year, simply repeat the schedule this year, making sure to give it regular balanced fertilizer.