

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 the tops just about 1/3 sticking out of the soil. If planting only one bulb, plant it in a 6" diameter pot and three bulbs are comfy in a 10"-12" pot. Make certain the pot has good drainage holes.

Water: Amaryllis do not require lots of water. When the top one inch of soil is dry, go ahead and water, making certain to avoid pouring water directly into the crown of the bulb. As the bulb grows and obtains more roots it may have a tendency to dry out more frequently, so just keep your eye on it and make certain it is always 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 has a tendency to lean towards 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. Make certain to bury the pot up to its rim in mulch, water it regularly, and to continue feeding it every 2-3 weeks.

Cold Storage: Amaryllis leaves will start to turn yellow and die in the 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 for about six 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, you can 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 6 weeks and resume watering. This is a great 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 may take several years to flower so make certain to keep them on the same care schedule as the mother.

Bloom Failure: For the most part, amaryllis will rebloom. However, if yours does not, simply repeat the schedule next year, making sure to give it regular balanced fertilizer.

With a huge selection of colors, and varieties, consider purchasing amaryllis at any stage of development. The real fun for many enthusiasts is growing them from a bulb and in time to bloom for Christmas. They provide fantastic results for experienced gardeners but even a novice can expect success.