

Okay, you've got an amaryllis — now what?

Dennis Patton says an amaryllis makes the perfect gift, either for a friend or yourself, and with proper care they will delight for many years to come. He has several pots of amaryllis that are third generation, handed down by his grandmother.

Poinsettias maybe the star of the holiday season but there are many other seasonal plants that can brighten the home. Amaryllis is a tender bulb that is ready to bloom when purchased. The genus name for this plant is *Hippeastrum*, which means “horse star,” an appropriate name for a plant that produces massive blooms as large as 8-10 inches across.

These plants can produce three to four blooms on a 1 to 2-foot stem. Often, a second flower stalk follows the first at about the time the flowers on the first stem fade. The leaves usually start to appear when the flowers begin to open.



Amaryllis bulbs can be huge — approaching the size of a grapefruit. Size does matter as the larger the bulb, the larger the flowers. Larger bulbs, which have more flower power, also tend to be more expensive.

Regardless of size, amaryllis likes tight quarters. Place in a pot only 1-2 inches larger in diameter than the bulb. About half of the bulb should remain exposed. Hold the bulb so the roots hang down into the pot, and add potting mix. Firm the mix around the roots carefully so that they are not snapped off. Water thoroughly and place the plant in a warm, sunny location.

Bulbs can be purchased in a complete kit during the holiday season. Along with the bulb comes a pot and soil. Some kits have a vase and pebbles for the bulb to be grown in water. If this type of bulb kit is purchased consider the bulb depleted and throw it away. But potted bulbs can be saved and re-bloomed with a little extra care.

Amaryllis likes day temperatures in the 70's and night temperatures in the 60's. The flower bud may start to appear right away, or the plant may remain dormant for a period of time, but eventually all mature bulbs bloom. Move the plant to a cooler location and out of direct sunlight when the flower buds begin to show color so the flowers last longer. Amaryllis can remain in bloom for about a month.

Flowers should be cut off after blooming to keep the plant from expending energy to form seeds. Place the plant in a sunny location until it is warm enough to be placed outside. Sink the pot in the soil in an area that has dappled shade. The plant can gradually be moved to sunnier locations until it receives full sun for a half day. Continue to fertilize with a balanced houseplant fertilizer as you would a normal houseplant.

Amaryllis must go through a resting or dormant period before they will re-bloom. Bring the pot in before first frost and place in a dark location. Withhold all water so the leaves have a chance to dry completely. Leaves can then be cut off close to the top of the bulb. Most varieties will require about eight weeks of dormancy. After that time they can be brought back into the light and the blooming process can start.

Amaryllis can often be left in the same pot for several years but will eventually need repotting. Select a pot that is only 1-2 inches larger in diameter than the bulb and repeat the process described above. Offsets or new bulbs are normally produced by amaryllis and can be given their own pots if desired.

Amaryllis makes the perfect gift, either for a friend or yourself, and with proper care they will delight for many years to come. I have several pots of amaryllis that are third generation, handed down by my grandmother. They have already started to bloom and I think of her each time I see their cheery holiday colors. - *Dennis Patton*