

My editor with the Kearney Hub always titles my columns; however, if I were to give this column a title, I would call it ***The Tale of the Albino Amaryllis***.

For those not familiar, amaryllis are tropical flowers (hardiness Zones 10 and 11) with very large showy blossoms in shades of red, pink, white, salmon or orange. Many are bi-colored having contrasting stripes on the petals. Individual flowers are as large as six inches across and either appear as a single flower atop a tall stem or have two to four blossoms per stem. The amaryllis grows from a bulb that is teardrop shaped and usually three to four inches in size. The larger the bulb, the larger the flower.

My story begins several years ago around Christmas and continues nearly every Christmas thereafter. Amaryllis bulbs are most frequently sold around the holidays. They are marketed as the perfect gift for the gardening enthusiast creating what one might call a “Do-it-Yourself” gardening gift. Through the years I’ve been the recipient of these gifts numerous times.

Most often a single amaryllis bulb is sold with a flower pot and potting soil. The flower pot with a single drainage hole is slightly larger than the bulb, and when planted correctly, the upper one-third of the bulb protrudes above the surface of the potting soil. The potted bulb is then placed in a warm bright location in one’s home or office. A south-facing window with six to eight hours of sunlight is an ideal growing spot. It usually takes six to eight weeks after planting for amaryllis to bloom. First, a series of strap-like, dark-green leaves appear from the top of the bulb. The leaves grow to about twelve inches in length and one inch in width. When the leaves are fully grown, a light green, hollow, one-inch tubular flower stalk begins to emerge. The flower stock grows remarkably fast and is capable of reaching heights of one to three feet. Atop the flower stalk forms the flower bud. After the flower stalk has attained its full height, the flower buds begin to expand, soon giving rise to huge colorful amaryllis blooms. The flowers last about two weeks.

Once the plant has bloomed, its attraction quickly vanishes, and rather than care for the plant over the winter months, most recipients dispose of it. Not me!

I continue to keep my amaryllis plants alive, and when spring arrives, I set them outdoors in a semi-shaded location for the summer. After caring for my amaryllis plants through the summer months, I then carry them indoors to a dark room in our basement. However, before carrying them indoors, I allow the frost to kill the leaves but not the bulb. Once in the basement, I stop watering the plants and allow the bulb to go dormant. Several years ago, I potted all my amaryllis bulbs in one pot for ease of handling.

After the bulbs have rested, I then get them to re-bloom. Around Christmas time, I normally carry my amaryllis pot upstairs, place it in a bright window and begin watering. By Valentine's Day, I am generally enjoying amaryllis blooms.



This year, I forgot my bulbs in the basement. Three weeks ago, I spotted the **Albino Amaryllis**. Apparently, while sitting in nearly total darkness, enough warmth and moisture were present for the bulbs to fully sprout leaves and grow flower stalks. Sadly the leaves, flower stalks and flower buds were snow white in color. For a brief moment, I thought they were ruined. I immediately carried the pot upstairs, placed it in front of a bright window and began watering. Low and behold, within two weeks, all the leaves and flower stalks had turned green and shortly thereafter, beautiful amaryllis flowers appeared!

When all the flowers fade, I will cut away the flower stalks and let the plant grow outdoors. From there, I will start the re-blooming process over again. This time, however, I've marked by calendar to carry the pot upstairs from the dark basement at Christmas. I was lucky this time. My **Albino Amaryllis** lived.