

The Amaryllis

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Of all the holiday plants, the amaryllis boasts some of the largest flowers and can be one of the easiest to grow for next year's re-bloom. Bulbs received as gifts can be planted right away and their fast growth will amaze everyone, even those with brown thumbs. Hybridization has greatly expanded the red-flowered offerings of the amaryllis, with flowers of pink, white, salmon, fuchsia, the softest of yellows, striped, narrow-petalled, double blooms or miniature. Any way they are enjoyed, amaryllis can be an exciting gift for novice gardeners as well as the skilled.

Bulbs are graded according to size, with premium-sized ones sending out two or more flowering stalks. If the bulb doesn't come with a pot, no worries, just choose a pot that is two inches larger in diameter than the bulb. This allows about one inch of soil space completely around the planted bulb. Add soil so the soil line comes half way up the side of the bulb. Water and place the potted bulb in a bright window. Once leaves and flower stalks emerge, growth is amazingly quick. Growth is so quick, in fact, that staking may be necessary. Give the pot a quarter turn daily to prevent excessive lean toward windows. Remove spent blooms to keep the plant looking good.

Once the amaryllis has completed blooming, remove the spent flower stalk as close to the bulb as possible without damaging leaves. Keep the plant in a bright window and water when dry. The long strap-like leaves will continue to flourish during the winter months. In the spring, after all danger of frost is past, the amaryllis can be brought outdoors, leaving the bulb in the pot or planted directly into the garden. Water during dry spells and fertilize monthly to help the bulb replenish its carbohydrate storage. Unfortunately, the amaryllis is not hardy in our climate, so be sure to bring in the bulb in the fall before the first frost. The bulb will need about nine weeks of rest before it will flower again so store it in a cool (not freezing) dark place. To initiate flowering, place the potted bulb in a bright window and resume watering.

Amaryllis bulbs taken care of in this way will continue to provide flowers for years to come.