

AMARYLLIS

Question: I see amaryllis bulbs for sale everywhere during the holiday season. The pictures on the boxes promise such beautiful blooms. Are these flowers hard to grow?

Answer: It is hard to find a plant that produces more spectacular results with such little effort than an amaryllis. You can find ready-to-plant bulbs in garden centers, or pre-potted bulbs in many retail outlets this time of year. Another fairly-recent addition to the retail market is bulbs encased in a decorative wax.

The plant we call amaryllis is actually misnamed. The genus *Amaryllis* only has two species in it – and does not include our decorative holiday bulb. The genus *Amaryllis* is native to Africa and the one species you are probably familiar with is the belladonna lily, also known as the “naked lady” lily. These are a common outdoor bulb in our area. The plant we call amaryllis is from the genus *Hippeastrum* and is native to South and Central America. *Hippeastrum* has over 90 species and 600 named cultivars.

Amaryllis bulbs are typically 2-5” in size and the plant will produce up to four flower stalks. Choose the largest bulbs you can find for the best flower show. The trumpet-shaped flowers can be anywhere from 4-10 inches in size and come in shades of reds, pinks, salmon, white and bicolored. If you are planting a bulb, plant the pointed end up in a 6-8 inch pot (preferably a weighty pot as the plant will grow tall). Plant the bulb so 1/3 of it remains above the soil line. Place the pot in a location with bright indirect light and water it sparingly until 2 inches of new growth appears. At that time, you can begin regular watering, but don’t let it become soggy or the bulb may rot. Do not fertilize during this time.

When the flowers bloom, keep your plant out of direct sunlight to prolong the life of the blooms. I haven’t tried this, but have read that they make nice cut flowers,



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and their vase life is as good or better than leaving them on the plant.

If you buy your bulbs already potted, follow the directions they come with, but keep in mind you do not want to overwater. If you buy a waxed bulb, the care is even easier. Do nothing but keep it in bright indirect light. Doesn’t get much easier than that! (I will confess that I had a waxed bulb last year and felt like I should at least mist it a little – probably unnecessary, but it made me feel better.)

After your blooms have

faded, you can either toss your bulb into the compost pile or, if you want to try to get it to re-bloom next year, follow these instructions: after the flowers fade, cut the flower stalk (not the leaves) back to within 1 inch of the bulb. Continue to water the plant and feed it regularly with liquid plant food. During the spring and summer, it will grow leaves. In late summer, withhold all water and let the foliage die back. Store the dormant bulb in a cool, dark, and dry place (preferably 45-55 degrees) a minimum of eight weeks. Repot the bulb and start all over as above. The plant will typically flower about six to eight weeks after planting. (You can try this with a waxed bulb also— remove the wax and any wire. If

the bulb is firm, proceed as above.)

Amaryllis flowers are truly a great mood-lifter for our gray winters. They make great gifts and even your friends and family with limited space and skill can have fantastic results. Brighten your home with a beautiful amaryllis this winter!

Do you have a gardening or insect question? Contact the Douglas County Master Gardeners at douglasmg@oregonstate.edu or 541-672-4461 or visit 1134 SE Douglas Ave., Roseburg, Douglas County Master Gardeners are trained volunteers who help the OSU Extension Service serve the people of Douglas County.



Amaryllis in three different colors.
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