

GROWING AN AMARYLLIS by Shirley McCorkle, GCG Indoor Gardening Resources Chairman

Amaryllis are prized for their exotic trumpet-shaped flowers born on leafless stalks. They add dramatic color to homes and make wonderful gifts. Homes can be decorated with seasonal colors of amaryllis of red, white, pink, salmon, apricot, rose, deep burgundy or by colors such as purple and green. The name comes from the Greek word amarysso, which means to sparkle. In Victorian times amaryllis were associated with strength and determination because of their height and sturdiness.



Purchase the biggest bulbs you can find. Jumbo bulbs will produce 3 stems with 4 or 5 flowers from each stem. Bulbs should be firm and dry with no mold, decay, or injury. If you want flowers all winter long, purchase different varieties and plant at different times. Amaryllis have long stems and big flowers. A heavy pot with a wide base of about 2 inches wider than the bulbs will help the plant stay upright. Fill the container halfway with sterile, organic soil. Use a house plant fertilizer with a high phosphorus content. Plant bulbs with pointed end up so the roots sit on the potting soil. The pointed end is the top of the bulb. Backfill soil until the top third of the bulb is visible. Set the pot in the sink and water until potting soil is thoroughly moist. Place in indirect light like a sunny windowsill at 60-70 degrees temperature. Water only when the 2 inches of soil is dry. The first thing to emerge is a bud. Rotate the pot every few days. Plants can be staked to remain stable.



Amaryllis flowers usually bloom for a couple of weeks. Move the plant out of direct sunlight and into a cooler location when bulbs start to show color. The plant will bloom longer. Amaryllis bulbs can last years with great care. After it blooms and the old flowers fade, cut the flowers to prevent them from going to seed. Cut the stalk back when it turns yellow. Do not cut when green because it is storing energy for future growth. Water and fertilize regularly. After the plant dies back and is completely dry, store it in a cool dark place such as a closet or basement. It will go dormant. Leave the plant dark for 8-12 weeks. Do not water. After 8-12 weeks, place in a sunny location, water and fertilize. Flowers usually develop in 4-6 weeks.

It is exciting to see the beautiful amaryllis growing whether it is the first or fiftieth flower.

Addendum from a South Georgia gardener: Bulbs can also be planted outdoors in the southern part of our state and will bloom year after year. When the bulb is finished blooming in its container, cut the leaves off the plant until you reach the upper part (the neck) of the bulb. Keeping the bulb in the container provides sunlight and water. After the last frost date, replant your bulb outside. Amaryllis prefer sun with afternoon shade. Plant in well-drained soil to the same depth as in the container. Fertilize now and then each year after blooming. They will bloom in late spring to summer.