

TREASURE VALLEY GROWN
FARM SEEDS

AMARYLLIS: YEAR-ROUND CARE

Amaryllis are popular indoor plants in the winter and spring, with large lily-like flowers on tall stems. They are also a popular holiday gift. As a bulb, it shares some care and growth methods used with other bulbs. However, because of its background as a tropical plant, and bloom cycle, there are differences. The bulb is NOT winter hardy, so would not survive planted outdoors, as would tulips, daffodils, etc. The amaryllis is for indoor blooms on a yearly cycle. With proper care, the bulb will flower again each year.

ESTABLISHING THE NEW BULB

A newly purchased bulb does not require pre-cooling to be forced, as do daffodils and tulips. Newly purchased bulbs should be kept in a cool, dry location with air circulation until they can be planted. The bulb must NOT be frozen! If the bulb is not already potted when purchased, one should choose a pot about half-again as wide as the bulb. This is done because the bulb prefers to be pot bound, with no more than 2 inches from the side of the bulb to the wall of the pot. A normal bulb fits in a 6 to 8 inch diameter pot. The pot MUST have drainage hole(s) in its base.

Pot the bulb with good, sterile planting medium so that the top third of the bulb (including its 'neck') is above the soil. This ensures that no water placed on the surface of the soil will go down into the bulb's neck. It is not necessary to cover the top of the bulb completely with soil—all the 'action' takes place at the base and roots. It is NOT necessary to put fertilizer or other supplements such as bone meal with the bulb, but if desired, a general purpose bulb fertilizer may be placed under the bulb (1/2 tsp./ fertilizer mixed with the dirt under the bulb—no fertilizer touching the bulb.)

Leave some room between the bulb and the inside of the pot so that a support stick can be placed down through the dirt to support the stem at a later time. If you look at the bulb's 'neck' you will see it is more oval or flat than round. The longest 'sides' of the neck will be where the leaves emerge. The edges of the leaves will be at the 'pointed' ends of the oval neck.

BEGINNING THE GROWING SEASON

Begin the forcing process 6-8 weeks before bloom is desired. Water the potted bulb ONCE thoroughly, from top and bottom of the pot. Do not water regularly until new green growth appears at the top of the neck. If the soil dries out before that time, water no more than once per week, preferably from the bottom of the pot (see below). The bulb is developing roots to bring moisture into it. Excessive watering at this stage will rot the bulb.

Overwatering at the beginning of amaryllis growth is the main reason for failure.

Keep the plant at room temperature. Remember, due to its tropical origins, a newly purchased bulb does NOT need cooling to be forced.

When growth appears, it may be thin flat green leaves, a flower stem that is rounded and topped with a 'knob' bud, or a combination of the two. After this point, water whenever the soil below the top inch is dry - no more than once every 3 days. It is best to water by placing the pot in a pan of water of a level halfway up on the pot's height, to allow the soil to draw up water through the base of the pot. Don't plant in a sealed pot, and don't let the pot sit in water for long periods.

As the stem and leaves grow, it may be wise to provide a support with a stick or wire to hold up the flower stem. When the blooms open, the stem will become top heavy, and could bend over and break. Be careful when putting a support into the pot's dirt - do not push the support through the bulb below the soil. The leaves may grow on either side of a main stem; or leaves may grow one side of the bulb's neck, with the stem on the other side of the neck.

At the top of each main stem is a bud case which contains the flowers. This will enlarge, and open, revealing the flowers. At first, the flowers are green, and will develop their color over a period of days before the petals unfold. At the time that flowers are opening, ensure the plant is moist, without drowning it!

IN BLOOM

Typically, each flower stem produces four blooms, which open within 2-3 days of each other. Hearty bulbs of large diameter may produce more than one stem at a time.

Once blossoms open, keeping the plant in a cool, shaded room (65 F) will prolong the life of the bloom. A blooming amaryllis does NOT need to sit in a bright room or sunlight. Heat & light causes the bloom to wither. Blooms may last several days to a week. Be careful to not let the pollen get on fabrics - it can stain some cloth.

If you need to support the stem, don't tie a string or wire around it; a wire loop around but not touching the stem will provide it support if it leans under the weight of the open flowers.

When each bloom withers, cut the flower off just in back of the bloom, removing the green 'lump' in back of the blossom, and the thin stem connecting the bloom to the main flower stem. This is done so that the plant does not waste energy forming seeds behind each bloom. It is not worth trying to propagate amaryllis from seed, as it would be a multi-year project until you produced a bulb capable of flowering.

When all blooms on the top of the main stem are spent and removed, cut the main stem off 2 inches above the bulb. You will note that the main stem is hollow - as are the stems of daffodils, which are in the same family. The stem was rigid because of the water in its tissues.

Put the plant back into normal light, water as necessary. If the plant did not have many leaves at the time of bloom, it may produce many leaves now. Do not trim the leaves off. Leaf growth and sunlight will send nutrients down to the bulb. Treat the amaryllis as a treasured household plant during the Spring.

SUMMER PERIOD

In June, the amaryllis can be put outdoors for the summer. You may plant the pot and all - this protects the bulb from chewing or tunneling insects. Also, amaryllis prefer being pot-bound, and do not like being transplanted from pot to garden for the summer.

Water & fertilize the area as with any plant. Amaryllis can stand a sunny location; if in a shady spot, they cannot get energy to 'recharge' themselves. Leaf growth may continue; nutrients are going from the leaves to feed the bulb. The pot may also stand on a porch, patio or on the ground. Ensure the pot will drain water and not let it collect to rot the bulb.

ENTERING DORMANT PERIOD

As summer ends, you may notice the leaves yellowing or withering. Bring the plant indoors **before** the first frost. Cut off the dead leaves at the top of the bulb's neck. Let any live leaves remain. Keep the bulb in its pot. If it had been removed from the pot to be placed outdoors, re-pot it immediately after removing from ground - do not allow roots to dry out. At this point the bulb has an extensive root system unlike a newly-purchased bulb.

For the bulb to flower again, we must simulate its life cycle, and force it to go dormant. Put the potted amaryllis in a cool (55 degrees F), dimly-lit place such as a cellar for 6-8 weeks. You should not water the bulb. As the leaves yellow and wither, cut them off at the top of the bulb's neck.

FORCING AFTER DORMANCY

End the dormant period when you are ready to start the blooming period once more. Start the forcing process 6-8 weeks before you want blooming. Cut any dead tissue off the bulb's neck. Remove the top 1/2 inch of soil from the pot, replace with new soil. Do not remove the bulb from the pot. Water the potted bulb **ONCE** thoroughly, and place the pot in normal indoor temperature.

Follow the preceding schedule ("BEGINNING THE GROWING SEASON") as if this were a newly-purchased bulb. The bulb should break dormancy and start new growth with the energy it stored during its summer period in leaf.

POOR RESULTS?

If a plant produces leaves, but no flower stem, in a given year, continue to tend the plant so the leaves will feed the bulb for next year's flower. Some bulbs may not have the strength to produce the flowers each year.

If a bulb shows no green growth from forcing, use your fingers to squeeze the potted bulb below the dirt surface. If the bulb is not firm, it may have rotted and needs to be discarded. Rotting also can indicate that a bulb received too much watering during its cycle.