

AMARYLLIS

When it comes to forcing bulbs indoors, nothing provides the show of an amaryllis. The Dutch hybrids, which are the most common varieties, have dark red, scarlet, salmon, orange, pink, or white flowers that range from 6-10 inches across on sturdy 1-2 foot stalks. The colors are often mixed or striped, providing just the look you need to brighten those grey winter days. Forcing amaryllis bulbs is easy enough for even the most novice of gardeners and makes a fun project for kids.

When purchasing your amaryllis bulbs, remember that bigger is better. Bigger bulbs provide bigger blooms. You can purchase them unpotted, or for your convenience, purchase pre-potted bulbs. If you purchase the pre-potted bulbs, place the pot in a bright window, water once, leave it alone until noticeable growth begins, and then water regularly to keep the soil slightly moist, never wet or soggy. If in the right environment, they will bloom after 6-8 weeks. If you are forcing previously unpotted bulbs, simply plant your bulbs in a heavy container to support the weight of the tall stems and large blooms. The container only needs to be about 1" larger than the diameter of the bulb. Use a rich, well-drained potting soil, like **Berger Potting Mix**, and cover the lower two-thirds of the bulb. Again, place the container in a bright area, water the container once, leave it alone until noticeable growth begins, and then water regularly to keep the soil slightly moist. The plants will start to lean toward the light, so remember to rotate the container 1/2 turn weekly to keep your plant balanced. For big, bold blooms, it is recommended that you fertilize your amaryllis with a balanced fertilizer like **Peter's All Purpose Plant Food** once a week at half strength once the leaves appear. When the buds form and start to open, discontinue fertilization until after the blooming period. When the buds begin to open, it is a good idea to move the container to a lower light situation, such as the centerpiece of a table. This will prolong the blooming period. When the blooms have faded, cut them back all the way to the top of the bulb and resume fertilization. Do not cut back the foliage until it has faded and turned brown on its own. Fertilize at full strength every 2 weeks with **Super Bloom** to store carbohydrates for next year's blooms.

After danger of last frost, it is a good idea to place your container outside in an area that gets morning sun and afternoon shade. Burying the pot halfway into the soil will reduce stress. Continue watering and fertilizing the plant until all of the leaves have faded late in the season. After the last leaf has faded, or if the leaves are present at the time of the first frost, bring the container into a cool place like your garage. The bulb will need a resting period of 8-10 weeks. Temperatures between 40-55o F are best for reblooming and watering is not necessary during this period. After the resting period, simply repot the bulb in fresh soil and begin the process again. Some varieties are tricky when it comes to reblooming the second year after being forced, but if you've been faithful about your fertilization, things should go well for you.

Some varieties of amaryllis are winter hardy in our area and can be planted in the ground after blooming. You will need to check on the particular variety you purchased before planting in your flowerbed. If it is hardy, wait until after danger of last frost to plant it, then place it in an area that receives morning sun, remembering to leave the bulb's neck exposed above the soil level. They should be placed about 1 foot apart. Continue watering and fertilizing as previously described, leaving the foliage until it fades naturally. In the landscape, amaryllis will bloom once per year, in late spring. When in the landscape, they look great as a background border among lower growing plants, like sweet alyssum.

If you have any question please call, write or drop by:

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