

## Guide to Growing Amaryllis

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The hybrid amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) is a tender bulb easily grown in pots. Amaryllis can be grown outdoors throughout the year in mild climates, but must be grown indoors in Nebraska except during the warm summer months. Amaryllis is prized for its huge showy flowers ranging from scarlet or crimson to white in color, and often striped or mottled. Most amaryllis are Dutch or African hybrids selected for flower size, color and ease of forcing. The usual flowering season is from February to April. The foliage grows during spring and summer, ripening early in the fall if temperatures are low and the soil is allowed to dry out. The bulb normally remains dormant until late winter (December or January).

The preferred soil mix for amaryllis is high in organic matter such as two parts of loam soil to one part of perlite to one part of well rotted manure. If manure is not available, another source of organic matter, such as peat, leaf mold,

composted bark or wood or compost, may be used.

Five- to six-inch pots are suitable, but the best size depends on the size of the bulbs which vary considerably. A space of approximately 2 inches between the bulb and the edge of the pot is desirable. Bulbs are usually received early in the winter. They can be potted at once or stored in nearly dry sand until the end of January when growth normally begins. In potting, place the bulb so that only about half of it is below the soil, with the upper part (pointed end) left exposed. Press the soil firmly around the bulb and water thoroughly. Do not water again until the roots are well developed as overwatering can lead to bulb rots. Only when the roots have become well established will the plants need more frequent watering. The foliage is weakened by being forced too rapidly if temperatures are higher than 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit during the period before flowering.

After the flower bulb has emerged, an application of a balanced fertilizer at intervals of 10 days is helpful. A liquid or dry fertilizer can be applied

and either inorganic or organic types are satisfactory for this plant. Be sure to read the label carefully so that you apply the correct amount of that particular fertilizer. Amaryllis will flower 6 to 8 weeks after growth is initiated.

When the flowers have withered, cut the stem off about two inches above the bulb. The growth is most active during the next two or three months and should be encouraged by ample water and fertilizer. When all danger of frost has passed, the plant may be plunged, pot and all, into the open ground in full sunlight, or it may be grown indoors in a bright location during the summer. Restrictions in growth during this period interfere with the proper development of the bulb in preparation for next spring's flowers. Gradually decrease watering late in summer when the leaves begin to turn yellow. Allow the soil to become completely dry when the foliage has died back. While in this dormant state, the bulb should be left in the pot and stored in a cool place, preferably at 40 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Turn the pot on its side and do not water during the dormant period.

### Reflowering

Since it requires 6 to 8 weeks from the beginning of growth to the production of flowers in amaryllis, you can have an extended flowering period by selecting the time for growth initiation. Begin by starting growth in the first bulbs in January and continue through the latter part of March. Before applying water to the soil in the pot to start the growth, check the pot to see

whether repotting is needed. Repotting is required if the bulb has increased so much in size that it is crowding the edge of the pot, or if offshoots have developed. After the bulb is removed from its pot, use a pointed stick to pick out as much of the soil as can be removed without damaging the roots. The bulb with some soil still adhering to its roots is set in a well-drained pot slightly larger than the old root bulb. Offsets or small bulbs should be taken off and potted in 3-inch pots. They will flower in two or three years. When the new leaves and flower spikes begin to show, the temperature may be increased to 75 degrees Fahrenheit. During bloom, cooler conditions will prolong the flowering period.

### Propagation

Amaryllis can be propagated by seed, offsets or cuttage. Since seeds do not always produce plants similar to their parents, most named hybrids and selected strains are propagated by cuttage. Seed pods of amaryllis develop rapidly and are mature within 4 to 5 weeks after the flower has been pollinated. Pods should be picked as soon as they turn yellow and begin to break open. Seeds should be removed from the pod, allowed to dry for a few days and planted immediately. The seed bed should be partially shaded, and the media used for seed germination should be well drained. Following germination, increase the light until the plants are receiving full sunlight.



Photo by James Manhart, Texas A&M University Herbarium

The bulbs may be cut vertically into as many as 60 pieces. Care should be taken that each piece has a portion of the stem tissue or basal plate of the bulb attached to the scales. The best time for cuttage is from August to November. The wedges should be planted immediately in a mixture of peat and sand. Bulbs purchased from garden stores or florists usually flower at Christmas time. These bulbs have been specially treated by the grower to allow for this early flowering. After this initial flowering at Christmas time, the amaryllis will bloom later in the following years. Generally, the earliest flowering occurs in February. However, you should be able to flower them for the Easter season by initiating growth at the proper time.

Source: Donald Steinegger.

## Winter Care of Houseplants

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Winter weather adversely affects growing conditions for houseplants. Proper care during the winter months can help insure the health of houseplants. Most houseplants grow well with daytime temperatures of 65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit and night temperatures of 60 to 65 degrees Fahrenheit. Temperatures below 50 degrees Fahrenheit or rapid temperature fluctuations may damage some plants. Keep houseplants away from cold drafts and hot air vents. Also make sure houseplant foliage doesn't touch cold windows.

Many houseplants prefer a humidity level of 40 to 50%. Unfortunately, the relative humidity found in many homes during the winter months may be only 10 to 20%, a level too low for many houseplants. Humidifiers are an excellent way to increase the relative humidity in a single room or throughout the entire home. Simple cultural procedures can also increase the relative humidity around houseplants. Try grouping plants together. The water evaporating from the potting soil, plus water lost


through the plant foliage or transpiration, will increase the relative humidity in the immediate vicinity of the houseplants. Another method is to place the houseplants on trays or saucers filled with pebbles or gravel and water. The bottoms of the pots should be above the water level. Misting houseplants is not an effective method to raise relative humidity. Misting would have to be done several times daily to appreciably raise the humidity level and is simply not practical.

Houseplants require less watering during the winter months than in spring and summer. Actively growing plants need more water than those at rest during the winter months. Plant species also affects watering frequency. Ferns prefer an evenly moist soil and should be watered frequently. Cacti and succulents, on the other hand, should not be watered until the potting soil is completely dry. The majority of houseplants fall between these two groups. Most houseplants should be watered when the soil is barely moist or almost dry to the touch. When watering houseplants, water them thoroughly. Water should freely drain out of the bottoms of the

pots. If the excess water drains into a saucer, discard the water and replace the saucer beneath the pot.

Houseplants need to be fertilized periodically when actively growing in the spring and summer. Fertilization is generally not necessary during the winter months because most plants are growing very little or resting. Indoor gardeners can begin to fertilize houseplants in March or April as growing conditions improve and the plants resume growth. Fertilizers are available in numerous forms: liquids, water soluble powders, tablets, spikes, etc. Regardless of the fertilizer type, carefully read and follow label directions.

Dust and grease often accumulate on the leaves of houseplants. The dust and grease not only makes them unattractive, it may slow plant growth. Cleaning houseplants improves their appearance, stimulates growth, and may help control insects and mites. Large leafed plants may be cleaned with a moist soft sponge or cloth. Another method is to place the plants in the shower or tub and gently wash the leaves. Be sure to adjust the water temperature before placing the plants under the shower head.



### Garden Guide

THINGS TO DO THIS MONTH

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- Check young trees and shrubs for rodent or rabbit damage. Prevent injury with fencing or protective collars.
- Use sand instead of salt for icy spots on the sidewalk.
- Brush snow from evergreens as soon as possible after a storm. Use a broom in an upward, sweeping motion. Serious damage may be caused by heavy snow or ice accumulating on the branches.
- Avoid heavy traffic on the frozen, dormant lawn. The crown of the plant may be severely damaged or killed.
- Review your vegetable garden plans. Perhaps a smaller garden with fewer weeds and insects will give you more produce.
- When reviewing your garden catalogs for new vegetable varieties, an important consideration is improved insect and/or disease resistance. Watch also for drought-tolerant types.
- Analyze last year's planting, fertilizing and spraying records. Make notes to reorder successful varieties as well as those you wish to try again.
- Check stored fruits and vegetables such as potatoes and apples for bad spots which may lead to decay. Remove and use those which show signs of spoiling. Separate others into slotted trays or bins to increase air circulation and reduce decay possibilities.
- To prolong bloom, protect poinsettias from drafts and keep them moderately moist.
- Turn and prune house plants regularly to keep them shapely. Pinch back new growth to promote bushy plants.
- Check all house plants closely for insect infestations. Quarantine gift plants until you determine that they are not harboring any pests.
- House plants and holiday gift plants should not be placed on top of the television. This location is too warm and in most homes too far from windows to provide adequate light.
- During the winter most houses are too dry for house plants. Humidity may be increased by placing plants on trays lined with pebbles and filled with water to within one half inch of the base of the pot.
- House plants with large leaves and smooth foliage, such as philodendrons, dracaena and rubber plant benefit if their leaves are washed at intervals to remove dust and grime, helping keep the leaf pores open.
- If you have some time this winter, paint the handles of garden tools red or orange. This will preserve the wood and make the tools easier to locate next summer when you lay them down in the garden or on the lawn.
- Move garden ornaments such as urns or jars into the garage or basement to prevent damage during the cold winter season. If containers are too large to move, cover them to prevent water collecting in them or turn them upside down during the winter so water will not collect and freeze in them causing breakage.
- Add garden record keeping to the list of New Year's resolutions. Make a note of which varieties of flowers and vegetables do best and which do poorly in your garden.
- Feed the birds regularly and see that they have water. Birds like suet, fruit, nuts and bread crumbs as well as bird seed.
- Do not wait until late in the winter to order seeds. Many varieties sell out early.