

# MESSENGER-INQUIRER

	University of Kentucky College of Agriculture, Food and Environment <i>Cooperative Extension Service</i>
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## **Huge Flowers Are Worth the Wait**

What a beautiful flower! The big blossoms catch your eye. Seeing this flower brings back happy memories of my grandmother's sitting on the table during the holiday season. The amaryllis brings joy to a gloomy winter day. My favorite part is to watch the flower bud emerge from the bulb and produce the huge blooms. They are fun to grow and work with to rebloom the next year.

Why all the excitement about the flowers? Three to four gorgeous 6- to 8-inch trumpet-like flowers are produced on a flower stalk reaching up to 22 inches tall. Each bloom opens close to the same time. Some bulbs may produce more than one flower stalk.

Red, pink, salmon, rose, deep burgundy, and white are common flower colors. Some flowers have two colors such as pink over white or red stripes on white or a white stripe down the center of the flower on a red background. Double-flowered forms, which look like a flower within a flower, are offered too.

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Care of the amaryllis bulb is fairly simple. The bulb should be dormant when you buy it unless buying a flowering plant. Select the largest bulb because the larger the bulb, the bigger the flowers. Make sure the bulb is firm and free from cuts and bruises.

Select a container at least 2 inches wider than the diameter of the bulb to allow 1 inch of soil around the side of the bulb. Amaryllis prefers to grow with little room available. The pot should have a drainage hole, otherwise, the bulb may remain too wet and rot.

Amaryllis requires rich, well-drained soil. Commercial potting mixes work best. Add about 1 tablespoon of bone meal to each 6-inch pot of soil.

When planting, remove dead or broken roots. Position the bulb so that one-third to one-half of it is above soil level. Make sure soil is filled around fleshy roots, and then water to remove air pockets around the roots. Water the bulb very little until it begins to grow; otherwise, the bulb may rot. Soil should remain slightly damp.

As soon as the leaves and flower stalk begin to peek out of the bulb, promptly move the plant to a bright location. It may take several weeks before growth begins after planting. There is considerable variation in the time required for flowers to develop. Occasionally, they may bloom in as little as four weeks but more often require six to eight weeks. The flower stalk usually begins to grow first, and the leaves appear later.

During early periods of growth, night temperatures of 55 to 65 degrees F are ideal. Higher temperatures result in longer leaves, and the flower stalk may become leggy. Support for the flower stalk with a stake is needed because the flowers are very heavy.

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After growth begins, frequent watering is necessary. Apply a water-soluble houseplant fertilizer about every three weeks. When a plant is in bloom, it should be moved out of direct sunlight to help increase the life of the flowers.

After flowering is complete, cut off flower stems to keep the bulb from wasting energy on developing seeds. Then move the plant back to a sunny window until spring. If you want the bulb to flower again next winter, it must continue to grow into the spring and summer to restore the bulb's food supply.

After the danger of frost is past, the plant may be moved outdoors to a protected location with light shade to keep the leaves from burning. Keep it in the pot. During the summer, keep it well-watered and fertilized to maintain vigor.

In the fall, the bulb should be moved indoors before frost. You may notice the leaves beginning to turn yellow in late summer. This is a signal to start withholding water. If the leaves do not turn yellow, start to withhold water when you bring it inside. Withhold the water until leaves dry and the bulb becomes dormant. Remove the dead leaves and store the bulb inside of its pot in a dark, cool location.

After a dormant period of about two months, follow the steps above and watch the amaryllis grow again and bloom in the winter.

Repotting the bulb is generally necessary about every three years. It is best to avoid disturbing it until repotting is necessary. If small bulbs have been produced around the main bulb, you can leave them until the main bulb is repotted or remove them right away. Plant each little bulb in a separate pot. It may take three or more years before they are big enough to bloom.

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For something different, instead of growing in soilless mix, the amaryllis bulb is sealed in colorful wax. A wire is inserted at the bottom of the bulb in the wax so it will stand up by itself. They do not need water and can be placed on the countertop or in a container without soil and water. The flower spike is not as tall since it does not have roots to support it. After the flowers bloom, the bulb is usually thrown away because most of the roots are cut off before the bulb is sealed in the wax.

For more information about growing amaryllis, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or [annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu](mailto:annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu).

Annette's Tip:

Amaryllises are available at local stores, through catalogs, or online. Enjoy the flowers!

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