

MESSENGER-INQUIRER



November 11, 2023

Holiday Houseplants to Enjoy

The first time I saw the huge red blooms of the amaryllis plant sitting on my grandmother's table, I was amazed. In addition, my mother looks forward to the gift of a beautiful poinsettia from my father. Both plants make beautiful additions to holiday decorations.

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) has gorgeous 6- to 8-inch trumpet-like flowers produced on a flower stalk. In general, Amaryllis may have three to four blossoms per stalk. The stalk may reach up to 22 inches tall. The flowers open about the same time. Some bulbs may produce more than one flower stalk.

Flower colors available include red, pink, salmon, orange, and white. Some flowers have two colors such as pink over white or red stripes on white. Even double flowered forms, which look like a flower within a flower, are offered.

Bulbs are available separately or in complete kits with soilless media and a pot. The bulb should be dormant when purchased unless buying a flowering plant. Select the largest bulb for the biggest flower. Make sure the bulb is firm and free from cuts and bruises.

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If a pot is not provided, 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 performs best potbound. The pot should have a drainage hole, otherwise, the bulb may remain too wet and rot.

Amaryllis requires a rich, well-drained soil. Commercial potting mixes work best or use the material from the kit.

When planting, remove dead and 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 water well. Then, water the bulb very little until it begins to grow. 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. 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. If necessary, support the flower stalk with a stake since the flowers are very heavy.

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.

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. Cut off the finished flower stems to keep the bulb from wasting energy on developing seeds. Move the plant back to a sunny window until spring or outside in bright, indirect light after the threat of frost is over.

Another festive plant is the poinsettia. Showy red, pink, or white portions, which are commonly referred to as the "flower," are modified leaves called bracts. The yellow center is the

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flower. Bract colors range from white to creamy white through shades of pink to punch and cranberry red, to the traditional red. Also, two to three colors may occur on the same bract.

Remember, poinsettia is not poisonous to people or pets. The poinsettia is classified as non-edible. Scientific research conducted at several universities showed no toxicity, no behavioral changes, and no mortality, even at extremely high doses. All non-edible plant materials should be kept out of reach of curious children or pets in the home.

Also, people with an allergy to latex may be allergic to poinsettias, according to information from the University of Illinois Cooperative Extension Service. Poinsettias produce a white milky sap when the leaves are damaged. The severity of the reaction depends on the person. Ask the recipient about allergies before giving it as a gift.

When the poinsettia arrives in the home, place it in a bright, sunny location. Ideally, foliage needs 3 to 4 hours or more of sunlight each day. Avoid cold air drafts and heat sources such as appliances, furnace vents, and fireplaces. A cool location in the house with sunlight available keeps the bracts colorful up to several months after the holidays have passed.

Regularly provide the poinsettia with thorough watering when the soil becomes dry to the touch. Do not allow the pot to sit in water. Pour out the excess amount in the pot cover or container under it. The plant's roots will begin to rot if the poinsettia is over-watered which will shorten the life of the plant.

After January 1, you can fertilize the poinsettia once a month with an all-purpose houseplant fertilizer.

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Remember that poinsettias do not like cold temperatures. The plant may be injured if exposed to 50 degrees F or lower. Keep this in mind when finding a location for the plant after Christmas.

For more information about amaryllis and poinsettia, contact the Daviess County Cooperative Extension Service at 270-685-8480 or annette.heisdorffer@uky.edu.

Annette's Tips:

If you would like to try to make your poinsettia bloom again next year, contact your County Cooperative Extension Service for a copy of the "Christmas Plants Brighten the Holiday Season", Hortfacts 60-03, or look on the web at

<http://www.uky.edu/hort/sites/www.uky.edu/hort/files/documents/christmasflowers.pdf>.

Upcoming Events:

November 14, 8:00 a.m. to noon: Free continuing education for Commercial Pesticide License holders. Please RSVP by calling 270-685-8480.

November 14 at 1:00 p.m. "What to Expect When You Are Expecting Emerald Ash Borer – in Daviess County" a discussion covering ash trees in the landscape and forest.

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