

Garden Center Guides



Amaryllis

Amaryllis (*Hippeastrum*) is also known as Barbados Lily. Although available year-round, the textured, large bell-shaped flowers make excellent cut flowers and container plants, especially around Christmas. Amaryllis come in a wide variety of colors and color combinations,

with tall varieties and hybrid varieties that bloom quickly on short stems.

The most common practice is to grow amaryllis in containers for winter blooming. Start with a quality bulb. Properly cared for, amaryllis bulbs produce for decades and may bear up to six flowers on a single stalk, each flower capable of becoming 6 inches in diameter. Two stalks per bulb are typical. Potting the bulb can be done anytime after a two month dormant or rest period. The bulb usually becomes dormant in late summer.

The bulb and soil should be dry at the time of planting, and offshoots can be removed and potted separately if desired. Use a small pot, with only an inch between the bulb and the pot. Enough room for your thumb is a good rule. Use well-drained potting soil, and plant the bulb so that one-half to two-thirds of the bulb neck is above the soil line. Leave about ½ inch of space between the soil the pot rim to facilitate watering. Thoroughly water after potting and keep the soil slightly moist until flowering. When flowering begins, increase watering frequency.

Amaryllis prefers bright sunlight and temperatures between 70 and 75 degrees. After flowering begins, cooler temperatures (65 degrees to as low as 40 degrees) will prolong the life of the flowers. As the plant grows, rotate the pot to keep the flower stalk straight because it will want to grow toward the light. Staking may be required if the variety is tall or the plant stretches due to too much nitrogen or too little light.

Plants will bloom 6 to 8 weeks after potting. Apply a water-soluble, liquid all-purpose fertilizer at half rate after the bulb has sprouted and at six-week intervals thereafter.

After each stalk of flowers has peaked and begun to fade, cut the stalk off 2 inches from the base. The plant can be grown indoors for the rest of the winter and then set outdoors in a sunny location in the spring after any chance of frost. As the plant begins to decline during the summer, allow the foliage to droop and yellow so the bulb will mature. Restrict watering as the bulb begins its resting period. Bring the bulbs indoors in September and store for at least two months in a cool dark location. Cut off the foliage after it has wilted and died.

After the rest period, the process can begin again. If needed, the bulb can be repotted, or a small amount of soil can be added to replace soil that washed away or settled out.

Used as cut flowers, amaryllis will last for 6 to 12 days. Cut the stem neatly with a sharp knife and place into a tall container filled with water almost hot to the touch. Let the water cool for a few hours and then arrange. Amaryllis does best if not arranged in floral foam. Re-cut the stems every two to three days and repeat the hot water treatment. Keep flowers in a cool location at night.

Emily Nolting, Ph.D.

Commercial Horticulture Specialist
K-State Research and Extension
enolting@ksu.edu