



On The Farm

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Amaryllis, with its beautiful clusters of fragrant blossoms, is a holiday favorite. A South African-native, it delivers its trumpet-shaped blossoms in the winter, often just in time for the holidays. That can mean Christmas but can also include Valentine's Day. There's nothing like the lift the bright red, white or pink blossoms can give your spirit during the coldest part of winter.

Amaryllis is [easy to grow and care for](#). It's bare bulbs are planted to time flowering for end-of-the-year gifts or for producing pleasing flowers through the short dark days of winter.

In November and December, the unfussy plants, well on their way to blossoming, are sold by grocery stores, gift shops, department stores and other places that cater to gift buyers or those who just want some color around the house. They're also sold as kits complete with pot, bulb and soil. These do-it-yourself packages make wonderful gifts for your favorite gardener.

Gifts of potted amaryllis are usually in blossom or well on their way. If your gift plant has only sprouts and no blossoms, put it in a warm, sunny place. Water it only when the soil is completely dry to a depth of at least an inch or more.

When blossoms appear, enjoy them as long as you can by keeping the plants in a cool place. They'll hold their blooms for weeks if kept from direct sunlight.

Once the flowers start to fade, cut them off but leave the stalks which will continue to produce the nutrients the plants will need to blossom the following year. This after-bloom growth is critical to future production. Once the flowers have been trimmed, move the plant into a sunny spot to help facilitate photosynthesis. Fertilize the plants regularly with a [balanced organic plant food](#).

Eventually the stalks will yellow and wither. Trim them back to the bulb and put their container in a cool, dark place. Do not water or fertilize during this period. In 8 to 10 weeks, the bulbs will again show new sprouts.

Once sprouts appear and you're ready for more blossoms, move the pot into a warm sunny place. Resume watering and feed with an organic fertilizer that's [high in phosphorous](#). During this time, potted bulbs can be moved outside once low temperatures stay above 50 degrees. Take time to acclimatize plants to the outdoors gradually.

After the summer bloom, it's time to repeat the steps above, trimming the blossoms, allowing the stalks to grow until they dry and wither. Trim back the stalks and keep your bulb dormant until it's time to begin the process again.

Timing during the late summer and early fall dormant period is crucial to producing flowers when you want them. Once stalks appear from the bulbs, it takes four to eight weeks before the flowers appear, depending on the conditions you provide it. Halloween is a good time to coax bulbs from their dormant period if you want blossoms for the holidays. Holding bulbs dormant well into December yields flowers in February.

The least expensive way to buy and grow amaryllis is to buy the bulbs and then plant them in the pots you choose. Choose firm buds that are free of cuts and bruises and carry a good cluster of roots at the bottom. Larger bulbs produce larger flowers. Inspect the top from where the flower stalks will grow making sure it's not soft or offering rot a way in. It's perfectly fine, even preferable, if a bit of growth has already begun to show itself. Larger bulbs will send up two or more stalks, one after another.

The plants grow best when slightly root-bound so choose a pot size according to the diameter of your bulb. Pick a pot with the width and weight to keep it from falling over from the top heavy stalks. Plant the bulb on an inch or two of soil and cover with soil leaving a third or so of its top above the soil line. Leave no more than an inch or so of soil between the bulb and the pot on all sides.

Drainage is important. Make sure the [potting soil](#) you use allows for it and that your pot has a hole in the bottom. Moss makes for an attractive ground cover for your plant.

After potting, give your plant a warm place to begin putting up growth. Sunlight encourages quicker, more compact growth, something that will prevent it from tipping over when it reaches its full height.

Amaryllis can be grown outdoors year-round in places where winter temperatures rarely descend below freezing. The University of North Carolina Extension Service [tells how easy it is](#).

Gift giver's tip: Don't overlook amaryllis as a gift for children. The plant's relatively quick growth and impressive flowers and foliage will keep their attention as well as teach budding young gardeners the rewards of consistent care. Charting their plants progress through blooming and dormant periods makes for a rewarding long term science project.

Note: Amaryllis leaves and flowers are poisonous. Don't leave plants where children might be tempted to pluck their beauty then put it in their mouths. [Cats](#) also find the blossoms a temptation.

Article by: Planet Natural Research Center

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