



2023 IS THE YEAR OF THE AMARYLLIS

By Dawn Pettinelli, UConn Home & Garden Education Center

Amaryllis with their huge trumpet shaped blooms are a favorite plant to give or receive over the holidays. So popular are these easy to grow bulbs that the National Garden Bureau has named 2023 the Year of the Amaryllis. While the amaryllis bulbs we buy over the holidays are members of the Amaryllidaceae family, they are of the genus, *Hippeastrum*.

These hefty bulbs are native to Central and South American and are comprised of about 90 species. There are over 600 named varieties to choose from in shades of red, pink, salmon, white, yellow and orange. Many are multi-colored or striped; some have picotee edges.



Photo by dmp2023

Ten million amaryllis bulbs are imported to the United States each year. Typically, it takes about 4 to 8 weeks from potting up until bloom, but the length of time varies slightly depending on whether the bulbs were imported from the northern or southern hemisphere. Bulbs from northern hemisphere growing sites, like Holland, will bloom in 4 to 6 weeks but those from South Africa take only 3 to 5 weeks. The reason for the difference in bloom times is not clear.

Single flowering amaryllis are most readily available locally. If ordering from a catalog, check out some varieties with incredible double flowers or those with narrow spidery like petals. Those with limited space can select miniature amaryllis cultivars.

Amaryllis can be purchased as individual bulbs ready for you to pot up, as kits that contain the bulb, pot and potting media, already potted up, or for any minimalists, as a waxed coated bulb that needs no potting or watering. The wax coated ones can just be set in a bright spot to bloom and once they finish blossoming, they would be discarded as they are meant for single use.

Bulbs that are potted up for bloom can live for years rewarding you with annual blossoms for your efforts. Chose a pot that is at least 1 inch wider than the widest part of the bulb. Since the plant is rather top-heavy when in full bloom, I like to use heavier clay or ceramic pots.

Soiless potting mixes are best. Place some in the bottom of the pot, then nestle in the bulb. The neck of the bulb should be lightly higher than the top of the pot. Once placed, fill in around the bulb with more potting mix. Next bring the pot to the sink and water thoroughly. Let drain before placing the pot on its saucer. There should be no need to water the bulb again until new growth appears but check every few days to make sure the potting mix doesn't dry out.

Amaryllis needs a lot of light so an ideal place for your plant would be a south facing window. Full sun, especially in the winter, is fine with them. If plants don't receive enough light, the flower stalks stretch and will probably need staking. Ideal temperatures to encourage the flower buds to grow are between 60 to 70 degrees F.

In a few weeks you should see the flower buds emerging from the bulb. At this time you can water as needed. Give the pot a quarter turn every couple of days so flower stalks won't bend towards the light. Once blossoms have faded, cut down the stems but allow the green straplike leaves to grow if you want to keep the plant and encourage it to bloom next year. Water and fertilize regularly. Use a houseplant fertilizer at half strength once a month until September.

While you can leave your plant in a pot all summer long, I usually plant mine in a shady part of the garden after the danger of frost has past and leave it out there until heavy frosts are predicted in October. Then either dig it up or take it out of its pot and put it in a cool, dark spot for 6 to 8 weeks. The leaves will turn brown and die and the bulb gets a little rest. Repot around mid-December or so for another spectacular show.

For more information on growing amaryllis or if you have any other gardening questions, contact the UConn Home & Garden Education at (877) 486-6271 or www.homegarden.cahnr.uconn.edu or your local Cooperative Extension Center.