

Post Rock Answers

By Cassie Thiessen December 8, 2023

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Amaryllis, the Perfect Christmas Plant

Poinsettias might be the star of the holiday season but there are many other seasonal plants that can brighten the home. Amaryllis is a tender bulb that is ready to bloom when purchased. The genus name for this plant is *Hippeastrum*, which means "horse star," an appropriate name for a plant that produces massive blooms as large as 8 – 10 inches across.

Amaryllis bulbs can be huge, approaching the size of a grapefruit. Size does matter as the larger the bulb, the larger the flowers. Regardless of size, amaryllis bulbs like tight quarters. Place in a pot only 1 – 2 inches larger in diameter than the bulb. About half of the bulb should remain exposed. Hold the bulb so the roots hang down into the pot, and add potting mix. Firm the mix around the roots carefully so that they are not snapped off. Water thoroughly and place the plant in a warm, sunny location.

Amaryllis likes day temperatures in the 70's and night temperatures in the 60's. The flower bud may start to appear right away, or the plant may remain dormant for a period of time, but eventually all mature bulbs bloom. Move the plant to a cooler location and out of direct sunlight when the flower buds begin to show color so the flowers last longer. Amaryllis can remain in bloom for about a month.

Flowers should be cut off after blooming to keep the plant from expending energy to form seeds. Place the plant in a sunny location until it is warm enough to be placed outside. Start the plant in an area that receives dappled shade. The plant can gradually be moved to sunnier locations until it receives full sun for a half day. Continue to fertilize with a balanced houseplant fertilizer as you would a normal houseplant.

Amaryllis must go through a resting or dormant period before they will re-bloom. Bring the pot in before first frost and place in a dark location. Withhold all water so the leaves have a chance to dry completely. Leaves can then be cut off close to the top of the bulb. Most varieties will require about eight weeks of dormancy. After that time, they can be brought back into the light and the blooming process can start.

Amaryllis flowers are the perfect way to add some color to your holiday season. They are easy to care for and can last from year to year. K-State Research and Extension has a variety of resources for all your gardening and plant needs. Give us a call with any questions.

Post Rock Extension District of K-State Research and Extension serves Jewell, Lincoln, Mitchell, Osborne, and Smith counties. Cassie may be contacted at cchiessen@ksu.edu or by calling Beloit (785-738-3597).