

## Amaryllis

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The first two plants that I associate with the holidays are poinsettias and Christmas cactus. There is another very popular plant though, that is also available at this time of the year and it too makes a great addition to the landscape. The plant that I am referring to is the amaryllis and it is usually available in red, white or combinations of red and white. Amaryllis typically have large, trumpet-shaped flowers for use as table decorations during the holidays.

Here in Florida, with our mild climate, we can plant Amaryllis either in the landscape or in containers. Whichever location you choose the plants can be grown outside year round. Amaryllis are excellent landscape plants and can be used in a variety of ways. They should be part of a planned landscape, not just planted haphazardly throughout the landscape. Amaryllis are most effective when they are grown in clumps of ten or more plants of the same color. Amaryllis can be used effectively as foundation plantings to make a pleasing contrast to nearby evergreen shrubbery. Other uses for amaryllis include plantings in terraces close to the house, in tree islands, on slopes, near a gate entrance or in borders.

Amaryllis does best in light shade to full sun. Heavily shaded sites should be avoided because the plants will not grow or flower well. Well-drained soil is a must. The soil for an amaryllis bed should be amended with 3-4 inches of organic matter such as compost or aged manure. Amaryllis bulbs can be planted anytime between September and January. The bulbs may be left in the ground for a number of years and periodically divided and replanted. The bulbs should be planted ten to twelve inches apart and set so that the top of the bulb is just covered with soil and the neck of the bulb is protruding above the ground. This is very important because bulbs that are planted too deeply will not produce flowers, only foliage!

To keep the amaryllis blooming well, it is recommended that they be fertilized two to three times a year with a bloom booster fertilizer which has a high amount of phosphorous. When you look at the analysis on the container, such as 15-30-15, the second number, which represents the amount of phosphorous, should be the highest number. Water is crucial for amaryllis growth. It is important that the soil is kept moderately moist during times of growth and flowering. A layer of mulch will help to conserve rain and irrigation water.

A good cultural practice is to remove dead blooms before seeds are produced. Flowering in the following season will be reduced considerably if seeds are allowed to set. Removing dead blooms will also help maintain the beauty of the planting and may prevent disease problems. To increase the life of the blooms simply remove the anthers, which will prevent pollination and therefore seed set. The anthers are the part of the flower that produces the pollen and can be recognized as the long yellow filaments sticking up from within the flower.

Amaryllis are easy to find at this time of year and come in large single blooms or double flowers (with lots of petals). Harder to find, but also available, are dwarf amaryllis which produce smaller flowers that are by no means less impressive. They are an ideal compliment to the larger blooming amaryllis or can be stunning as a

mass planting of their own. Though their flowers are smaller, the dwarfs produce up to 18 flowers per bulb! The belladonna lily (*Amaryllis belladonna*) bears clusters of fragrant flowers about three inches in diameter that come in colors of pink, rosy red, mauve or white. The blooms usually have contrasting yellow throats.

If you're out there shopping for that perfect gift for a plant-loving friend or family member, you may want to consider an amaryllis. Not only will they be attractive throughout the holidays but, they can easily be enjoyed for years to come in either a container or the landscape.