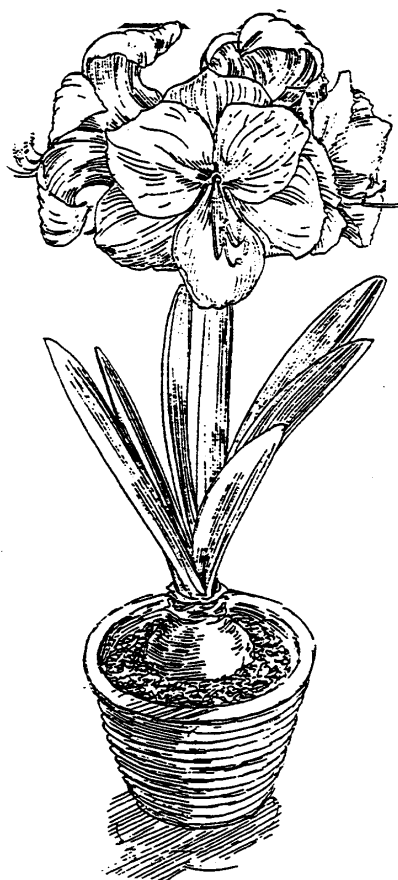


# AMARYLLIS

## HUMBER NURSERIES 'GREEN THUMB GUIDE'



**BRIGHT COLOURS** and enormous flowers make amaryllis plants (*Hippeastrum* hybrids) an exuberant antidote to gloomy winter days. These large bulbs send forth one or two hollow stems that elongate quickly before unfurling three or four lily like blossoms in vivid tropical shades of red, pink, salmon, orange, white or various bicolors.

Usually we acquire our first amaryllis as a holiday gift, enjoy its blossoms that winter, and then discard the plant, not realizing that amaryllis (like many gift plants) can live to brighten winter days again. True, the bulb uses up its reserves of energy in putting forth the first round of flowers, but with faithful care through the year, you can coax it to renew its strength so it will bloom again.

**1 INITIAL PLANTING.** An amaryllis blooms best when somewhat pot-bound, so choose a pot that is about seven inches deep but no more than an inch or two wider than the diameter of the bulb. A clay pot is preferable to a plastic one, because its weight will provide stability when the plant becomes top heavy.

Be sure the pot has one or more drainage holes; the roots of an amaryllis will die if the soil around them is constantly soggy. Cover the holes with pieces of broken clay pots or fine-mesh screen to keep the soil from washing out.

Fill the pot about halfway with commercial potting soil, packing it in fairly firmly.

Then set the bulb in place and pack the pot's rim. The top third of the bulb should protrude above the soil line so that water won't accumulate around its neck and cause it to rot. When the bulb is packed in, water it well once. Don't water again until the bulb shows active growth.

Place the pot in a bright warm room (65 to 75 degrees Fahrenheit by day, 5 to 10 degrees cooler by night) while the roots are developing.

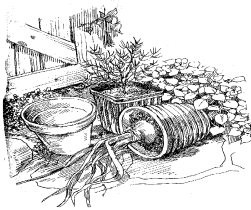
Within a few weeks, the first signs of the bud stalk will appear. Leaves usually begin to appear later.

Water the plant whenever the top of the soil feels dry, and feed it twice a month with bulb food or a liquid fertilizer (5-10-5 is best). Rotate the pot daily to encourage even growth of the broad, strap-like leaves. You may wish to support the heavy bloom stalk with a wire stake. When buds begin to open, move the plant into a cooler shadier room. Heat and bright light will cause the flowers to fade and wither more quickly.



**2 CARE AFTER BLOOM.** Your amaryllis bulb has just invested all its energy in producing flowers. It now needs plenty of water, fertilizer and sunshine to allow its leaves to carry on the process of photosynthesis to replenish the bulb's food supply.

Pinch off spent blossoms so the plant doesn't waste energy forming seeds. Don't remove any foliage yet. Move the plant to a sunny window, continue to water as needed, and fertilize twice a month to promote healthy leaves. The more leaves the plant grows in summer, the more flower stalks it will be able to produce the following winter. If you wish, move the pot outside once spring has truly arrived, or put it in a greenhouse or on an indoor windowsill. Try to find a spot where it will receive at least four hours of sunshine each day.



**REVIVAL.** Begin awakening your amaryllis bulb from its rest six to eight weeks before you want it to bloom again. Gently remove the top inch of soil with a spoon and replace it with fresh potting soil. Then water the plant well and fertilize. Follow the same schedule of care as last year to bring the plant into bloom and through the summer again.

An amaryllis may refuse to bloom again if its roots have been disturbed too often, so don't repot unless the bulb looks really crowded (once every three or four years is usually enough). You'll disrupt the plant least if you repot it at the start of the new growth period.

Occasionally, miniature plants (called 'pups') appear around the mother bulb. If you want a clump of amaryllis in one pot, leave them there. If not, you can remove them and pot them separately at the beginning of the new growth stage. Pups develop slowly but should bloom once they are three years old.

Sometimes, despite your best efforts, a revived amaryllis bulb will send up new leaves but no flower. Don't despair! If the plant seems healthy and strong, give it another chance by carrying it through another growing season – it may just need more time to gather the strength to rebloom.



**3 DORMANCY AND STORAGE.** To some extent, each amaryllis bulb seems to set its own timetable for going dormant and then reblooming. Usually however, the foliage begins to turn yellow and die back by late August (sometimes later or earlier), signaling the beginning of the plant's dormant stage. When this happens, stop watering and fertilizing. If you had set the pot outside over spring and summer, lay it on its side so that rain won't moisten the soil, and bring it in before the first hard frost. Cut off the dead foliage and store the bulb, still in its pot, in a dark, cool (about 40 – 50°F) spot such as a basement for about two months.



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