

Growing Amaryllis

Over the upcoming holidays, you may be the lucky recipient of *Hippeastrum vittatum* or Amaryllis which are widely available at garden centers at this time of year. You'll usually find them being sold in "kit" form, the bulb packaged with pot and soil included. Whether for yourself or someone else, Amaryllis will put on a great show during the dull winter months providing beauty and color indoors just when you need it most!

Native to South America and South Africa, Amaryllis is a member of the family Amaryllidaceae which includes such diverse plants as Daffodils, Clivia, Nerine and Agave. It's large lily or bell-shaped flowers range in color from pure white to wine red and every variation in between. Banded, striped, and bordered hybrids have been developed, transforming an already striking plant into an extraordinary specimen. It is not uncommon for the flower spike to rise 2½' above the top of the bulb and produce flowers 7" across.

Choose the largest Amaryllis bulb you can find, even if it costs a bit more. The larger the bulb, the more flowers it'll produce and the more success you'll have getting it to flower again in years to come. Carefully inspect the bulb and remove any dead roots, being careful to leave any live ones. The container should seem too small for the bulb with the pot being only an inch or two wider than the widest part of the bulb. Place the bulb in the pot so that about 1/3 of the bulb is exposed above the soil. Water thoroughly then place the container in a warm spot (on top of the refrigerator is a good spot). Light is not important at this stage. Don't water again until the flower stem begins to emerge from the top of the bulb. Now it must be moved to a bright location (not in direct sunlight) and kept lightly moist. If it's watered too much after growth has begun it will cause the bulb to rot.

When the huge flowers open, move the plant to a cooler location (as low as 50 degrees) to prolong the bloom period. When the flowers are spent, cut off the flower stem. By now the leaves have probably begun to emerge from the bulb. It is important to promote this leaf growth if you want your Amaryllis to continue to flower next season. Think of the leaves as solar collectors that convert energy from sunlight and store it in the bulb for next year's flowering cycle. The best way to keep your Amaryllis healthy through the summer is to sink the plant, pot and all, deep in the soil so the exposed bulb is almost covered. Before frost, move the potted bulb back inside and allow it to dry out completely. Keep it dry and store at 60-65 degrees for at least a month. This dry storage period is necessary to stimulate the Amaryllis to begin its' next growth cycle. It's important to remember that Amaryllis like to be potbound, so leave it in the same pot for at least 2 to 3 years.

Pick up a few of these beauties to give as holiday gifts, and while you're at it, be sure to grab one for yourself too. It'll brighten many bleak winter days with its' incredible show of blooms.



For More Information on Capital District Community Gardens' programs or to make a tax-deductible donation contact:



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