

## **Indoor Blooms for the Holidays**

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A few years ago, about this time, I went shopping for an amaryllis bulb to give my mom. I decided to purchase a kit that contained the bulb, a pot and a soil disc. It was hard to choose among the many varieties. I narrowed it down to the 'Red Lion' which has a striking, crimson red bloom; the 'Minerva' which has a red flower with a white, star-shaped middle; and the 'Apple Blossom' which has a white flower with pink tinges on the petals. Ultimately, I could not decide, so ended up buying all three. It was worth it. We had multiple, eye-catching blooms to enjoy over the holiday season.

The amaryllis is native to tropical and subtropical areas of the Americas. It normally flowers February to April but can be forced to bloom in time for the holidays. A bulb potted in early November should be in bloom by Christmas.

Amaryllis bulbs are widely available now in stores and garden centers. You can buy a kit or you can purchase just the bulb. If you have only the bulb, plant in a pot that is one to two inches wider than the base of the bulb. Amaryllis bulbs prefer to be a bit cramped when growing. Make sure the container has drainage holes. For bulbs, good drainage is essential.

Plant the bulb in well-drained potting soil. Begin by adding a small amount of potting soil in the bottom of the pot. Place the bulb in the center atop the soil then add additional potting soil, firming it around the roots and bulb. The top half of the bulb should be showing above the surface of the potting medium when finished.

Water thoroughly then place the potted bulb in a warm, sunny location (keep between 70-75 degrees F). Wait until the soil surface is dry to the touch before watering again. The soil should remain slightly moist but don't overwater. Also, avoid fertilizing the bulb until after it begins to grow. Use a water-soluble fertilizer once or twice a month. To keep the flower stalk growing straight, rotate the pot regularly.

Flowering usually occurs six to eight weeks after the bulb is potted. To prolong the life of the bloom, move the plant out of direct sunlight until the flower fades. Then remove the bloom to prevent seed formation. Cut the flower stalk back to about an inch or two above the bulb and place the plant back in a sunny location with the foliage intact. The plant uses its leaves to produce food that is stored in the bulb for next year's flower.

You can keep your amaryllis indoors all year or place it outside for the summer after the danger of frost has passed. If the plant will be outdoors for the summer, harden it off by placing it in a protected area out of direct sunlight for the first two to three days. Gradually increase the plant's exposure to direct sunlight until it is fully acclimated. Find a place where it will receive at least six hours of full sun. Bring the amaryllis back indoors before the first fall frost. Whether the plant stays indoors or out, water as needed and fertilize monthly to help build up its nutrients for next year's bloom.

To get amaryllis to rebloom, the bulb needs exposure to cool temperatures (between 50-55 degrees F). Amaryllis will naturally rebloom if kept in a well-lit, cool spot and tended as a green houseplant. However, there are steps you can take to control the bloom time. The bulb can be

forced to rebloom after going dormant or resting for eight to ten weeks. In early fall or when you bring your amaryllis back indoors, store the plant in a semi- dark place such as a basement or closet. The temperature should be cool but stay above freezing. This will induce dormancy. Do not water and only remove the foliage once it has turned yellow and shriveled. After the resting period, bring the plant into bright light and water thoroughly. Then wait for a beautiful bloom in about six weeks. Amaryllis performs best when slightly root bound so does not require repotting more than every few years. If needed, repot the bulb after the dormant period right as the growing cycle is beginning again. To read more about amaryllis, go to <https://wimastergardener.org/article/amaryllis-hippeastrum/>.