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Amaryllis bulb is beautiful flower for winter season

I would never consider trying to go through the winter season without treating myself to at least one amaryllis bulb, the correct botanical name is hippeastrum.

The bulbs from which these plants grow are readily obtainable from October through December. They are often promoted as Christmas plants but I prefer to start them in December so they will bloom in January after the Christmas decorations are packed away.

There are three classifications:

- 1.) large flowered — 20-30 inches



Let's Get Growing

Marjorie Mason Hogue

tall — blooms are six-seven inches across;

2.) small flowered (gracilis) 12-18 inches tall — blooms two-three inches across;

3.) double flowered — about 18 inch-

es tall with large double flowers.

Usually the flower stalk is produced first and then the leaves follow. Each stalk produces two to four blooms. The number of flower stalks depends on the size of the bulb. A three-year-old bulb (the size sold in kits that include pot and soil) will produce one or occasionally two flower stalks, but a larger bulb sold separately (you supply pot and soil) is a much better choice. It will have a minimum of two, usually three stems of bloom resulting in 12 flowers from one bulb.

Choose a pot (I prefer clay because its weight is a better anchor for the top heavy plant) that is just slightly wider in diameter than the bulb and deep enough to spread the roots. If the roots appear dry and shriveled, place the bulb on top of a glass or jar so the roots can dangle into lukewarm water for several hours or overnight.

Using a good potting soil, position the bulb so that its roots are spread and its neck is well above the soil level. Water thoroughly with lukewarm water and place in a warm location. Do not water again until a green shoot appears — some varieties take longer than others to break dormancy. Begin watering thoroughly when the soil feels dry to the touch. Place in a sunny location (away from heat vents) where nights are cool.

The flower stalk grows very quickly, making this plant an excellent gift for children and shut-ins. It should be turned daily so the stalk will remain straight.

When each flower stalk has finished blooming, cut it off cleanly at the base. When the leaves begin to grow, give regular applications of a 20-20-20 fertilizer according to package instructions. When flowering is finished, grow it as a houseplant until September. Then stop watering and allow the leaves to turn brown. Cut them off and put in a cool dark place. After a three-month rest period, repot the bulb and start the cycle again.

Consider this alternative to planting one bulb per six-inch pot. Although the bloom is spectacular, the length of bare stem with no foliage is not to everyone's liking.

Choose a large pot 12-14 inches in diameter. Place the amaryllis in the centre and surround it with plants that will camouflage bareness at bloom time but will appreciate its long strap shaped leaves as central foliage when blooming is finished.

When I tried this last winter, I selected a four-inch pot of each of the following: an asparagus fern, spider plant (for foliage contrast), English ivy (to trail over the pot) and a scented geranium with strong upright growth and fragrant foliage. The combination was a great success.

At the end of May I placed the container on the verandah where it performed beautifully outdoors all summer. In September it was dismantled — time for the amaryllis to rest. By this time the other plants had grown large enough to require individual pots.

You may send your questions or comments to:

Let's Get Growing
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attn: Marjorie Mason Hogue

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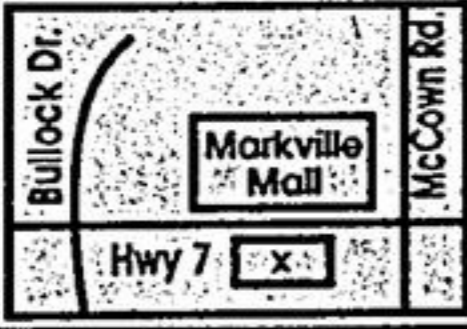
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