

Brighten indoors with colorful amaryllis blooms

By Melinda Myers

Brighten those gray winter days with a few colorful, easy-care amaryllis. The 6- to 10-inch trumpet shaped blossoms are sure to generate a smile and brighten your mood. And consider sharing the fun of growing these beauties with friends and families. Watching the bulbs transform into beautiful blossoms is an experience everyone will enjoy – and it's a gift that requires no dusting.

When buying amaryllis, purchase large bulbs for the biggest and longest lasting floral display. One jumbo bulb will send up multiple flower stems over several weeks. Smaller bulbs can be planted two or three to a pot to create a living bouquet.

Try some of the newer varieties like Lagoon and Red Pearl. Their 10-inch blossoms are sure to enliven any indoor decor. Grow the Nymph series of double amaryllis if you prefer large flowers on shorter stems. Cherry Nymph has a rose-like beauty with layers of fire engine red petals.



Red Pearl, a newer variety of amaryllis, has huge red velvety flowers that are deep crimson, overlaid with burgundy and maroon. Photo/Longfield-Gardens.com

And for something different, grow amaryllis Evergreen with long and narrow, pale chartreuse petals. Large bulbs will have two or more stems, each with four or more flowers. Or plant the uniquely shaped Exotic Star with garnet red stripes and apple green highlights on ivory petals.

Grow your amaryllis in a pot with drainage holes and use a quality potting mix. Plant large bulbs in individual pots that are 7-8 inches deep and 5-6 inches across. Or group several bulbs together in a larger container.

Look for unique containers or decorative baskets to showcase these beauties. To see some creative ways to display and decorate your home with amaryllis, download a free Winter-Blooming Bulbs Inspiration Book.

When planting amaryllis bulbs, the top half of the bulb should stay above the soil surface. You can dress up the container by

covering the soil surface with moss or decorative stones. Water the potting mix thoroughly after planting, and place the container in a cool (60-65 degrees), bright location. Water sparingly until the sprouts appear, and then start watering weekly, allowing the soil to dry out in between.

Or go soilless. Place several inches of pebbles in the bottom of a glass vase or watertight container. Cover the pebbles with water. Set the bulb on top of the pebbles and add more stones around the bulb to hold it in place. Add water as needed, keeping the water level just below (almost touching) the bulb.

Now relax and wait the month or more needed for your amaryllis bulb to wake up and start growing. Flower buds usually emerge before the leaves, but sometimes the leaves come first. When the buds begin to open, move your amaryllis away from direct sunlight to extend the flower display.

You can also display these magnificent blooms in a vase. Wait until the buds are soft and showing a little color, then cut the stems to the desired length and place them in a clean vase with fresh water.

To keep your blooming plant looking its best, use scissors to remove individual flowers as they fade. Cut the entire stem back to the bulb once it has finished blooming. And watch for a second or third flower stem to appear. Some bulbs produce multiple stems at one time while others rest a week or two before sending up another flower stem.

That's all there is to it. Just plant, water and place in a brightly lit location for weeks of fresh, colorful flowers this winter.

Melinda Myers has written numerous books, including "Small Space Gardening." She hosts the Great Courses "How to Grow Anything" DVD series and is a columnist and contributing editor for "Birds & Blooms" magazine.