Holiday blooms need to be planted soon

Popular amaryllis known to bloom 3-4 times during the season

MANHATTAN, Kan – ‘Tis the season to start thinking about decking the halls with holiday décor, which may include some of the season’s most colorful flowers.

“Now is the time to start amaryllis if you wish to have them in bloom for Christmas,” said Kansas State University horticulture expert Ward Upham.

Amaryllis, genus name *Hippeastrum*, are ready to bloom when purchased. *Hippeastrum* means “horse star” which is an appropriate name since this plant can produce blooms as large as 8-10 inches across.

“Amaryllis bulbs can be huge – approaching the size of a grapefruit,” Upham said “The larger the bulb, the larger the flowers and the more expensive the bulb.”

Despite its size, this plant prefers tight quarters. It is recommended to place in a pot only 1-2 inches larger than the diameter of the bulb, and to leave about half of the bulb exposed.

Upham explained how to properly pot the amaryllis:

- Hold the bulb so the roots hang down into the pot and add potting mix.
- Firm the mix around the roots carefully so that they are not snapped off.
- Water thoroughly and place the plant in a warm, sunny location.

A day temperature in the 70s and night temperature in 60s is optimal for the amaryllis to bloom, according to Upham.

“Once the flower buds begin to show, move the plant to a cooler location and out of direct sunlight so the flowers last longer. Amaryllis can remain in bloom for about a month,” he said.
“In order to keep the plan from expending energy to form seeds, flowers should be cut off after blooming.”

He added: “Place the plant back in a sunny location until it is warm enough to be placed outside. Sink the pot in the soil in an area that has dappled shade.”

Before the first frost, bring the plant inside and place it in a dark location, withholding all water so the leaves can completely dry. Leaves can be cut off close to the top of the bulb. The amaryllis can usually be left in the same pot for several years, but eventually will need repotting.

Amaryllis can produce 3-4 blooms on a 1-2 foot stem, according to Upham, meaning there will be plenty of blooms to admire this holiday season if planted now.

Upham and his colleagues in K-State’s Department of Horticulture and Natural Resources produce a weekly Horticulture Newsletter with tips for maintaining home landscapes. The newsletter is available to view online or can be delivered by email each week.

Interested persons can also send their garden- and yard-related questions to Upham at wupham@ksu.edu, or contact your local K-State Research and Extension office.

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K-State Research and Extension local offices, www.ksre.k-state.edu/about/stateandareamaps.html

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