

Fabulous and foolproof

Do you have trouble growing houseplants? Don't worry; I know a plant that is foolproof.

Amaryllis is a spectacular bulb. *Amaryllis* literally means "lily of love" and you will quickly fall in love with it!

Look for bulbs with a *variety name*, such as 'Minerva' (shown below) or 'Apple Blossom' (and there are many others). These types have been selected for outstanding form, vigor and color. Those bulbs listed by *color* only (red, white, pink or orange) are usually seed-started and inferior.

Plant the bulb in a pot, setting the bulb so that half of it is above the soil line. I like to use a pot with a broad base, sometimes called an "azalea" pot, to prevent the plant from tipping over.

After planting, water the bulb thoroughly and put it in a bright cool room. Keep it away from direct sun and water sparingly until growth appears.

Once it starts to grow, move the pot to a sunny window. Rotate the plant every week for symmetrical growth. If the plant gets top heavy, you'll have to stake it.

You'll swear it grows so quickly you can actually "hear" it grow. And wait until you see the blooms—they are magnificent!

You will see huge blooms in about five to six weeks. Plant the bulb before Thanksgiving and you will have a gorgeous plant during the Christmas holiday!

Here's a secret for success: find a huge bulb. Avoid the cheap bulbs often sold at big box stores. Big bulbs send up more than one flower stalk—the plant will bloom for several weeks! Big bulbs are also much more likely to rebloom in future years.

Another tip: you can prolong the life of each bloom by clipping off the stamens (their pollen will stain the petals) and moving the plant out of direct sunlight.


Once all the flowers have faded, you have the challenge of getting the bulb to bloom again for next winter. It's not easy, especially if you start with a bargain bulb.

Start by trimming away the old flower stalk down to the base.

Place your amaryllis near a sunny window and fertilize it monthly with a houseplant fertilizer. You want to keep the plant growing well to help it build up enough energy for next year's flowers.

In June, set the plant outdoors. You can keep it in the pot or transplant it in the garden. Water it regularly and continue fertilizing through summer. When the foliage begins to turn yellow in early fall, cut back on feeding and watering—the bulb has been refilled and now wants to rest.

Wash the soil from the roots and place it in a cool, dark spot for at least six weeks. A refrigerator works well, but make sure no apples are in the refrigerator (this will prevent the bulb from blooming again).

Repot the bulb in early November. If you're lucky, you should see beautiful flowers for next Christmas. 

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