

## Care and Handling



**FESTIVE FLOWER** Whether cut or potted, Amaryllis looks lovely and lasts for most of the holiday season. So customers can enjoy it as long as possible, sell Amaryllis before flowers open (see far left image).

## HOLLY, JOLLY HIPPEASTRUM

➤ Though poinsettias will probably always be the favored traditional plant for the holiday season, many other flowers — especially if they are red or white — also provide a festive look. The white flowers of freesias, callas, Christmas cactus and paper white narcissus fit perfectly into any holiday scheme. One of the most spectacular flowers for the season is amaryllis, which comes in red, white, pink or a combination of these colors on the same flower. Whether used as a cut flower or a container plant, their dramatic flowers will easily last during the holiday season when handled with proper care.

### Potted Protocol

Known botanically as *Hippeastrum*, amaryllis flowers are always available early to mid-winter. As a flowering potted plant, Amaryllis should be marketed when the floral stalk is about 6 to 12 inches tall and the buds appear puffy and are just showing color. Leaves should be dark green and free of mold or brown spots. A second floral stalk is highly desirable. Amaryllis flowers are extremely sensitive to ethylene, so purchase only those pretreated to protect against ethylene exposure — ask the supplier — and keep away from ethylene sources.

Unbox immediately upon arrival. Potted amaryllis need bright, indirect light conditions in a cool location (60 F to 65 F) while on display. Rotate container

to prevent stalks growing toward the light if necessary. The soil should stay consistently moist, and avoid getting the bulb wet when watering. Sell amaryllis before flowers open for the consumer to enjoy the plant for the longest period. Flowers should last two to three weeks or more, depending on the cultivar, number of flower stalks and holding conditions.

Attach consumer tags in the pot. Tell customers to keep amaryllis plants in bright light conditions but away from direct sunlight and drafts. Warm temperatures and low light can hasten the stems to elongate and topple. As the blooms open, advise customers to remove pollen-bearing anthers and, as they start to fade and wither, the blooms. Flowers can re-bloom from year to year for customers willing to put in a bit of effort (search “how to get potted amaryllis to re-bloom” for a helpful document from the US National Arboretum).

### Fresh Cut Care

Cut amaryllis flowers should arrive with the buds showing color but not opened. Remove from boxes upon arrival and cut at least 1 inch off the bottom of the stem. Immediately place the stem into a freshly made hydration solution with cold water (40 F to 50 F) for the recommended time. Cold water slows the opening of the flower. Flowers should be hydrated for at least two hours before using or selling them.

Place flowers into a bulb-flower food solution for in-store display. These solutions are specially formulated to reduce leaf yellowing and stem elongation to maximize quality and vase life. Cut amaryllis can be stored at 41 F to 50 F; flowers will be damaged at temperatures lower than 40 F. If you need the flowers to open quickly, keep at room temperature to hasten the process. Cut amaryllis stems are prone to curling or splitting in solution, but wrapping the base of the stems with waterproof tape will prevent this.

Provide consumers with bulb-flower food solutions. As with potted Amaryllis, tell customers to remove the pollen and faded flowers. Flowers should be placed in bright, indirect light at 60 F to 70 F. With proper care, amaryllis flowers can last eight to 14 days or longer, with individual blooms lasting two to five days.

Numerous cultivars of cut amaryllis are available throughout most of the year. Its spectacular flowers, whether used as cut flowers or potted plants, can provide enjoyment for consumers for a lengthy period if handled and maintained properly. 🌺

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