

Tale from the Garden!

However patient you are, every now & then you need a bit of instant action in the gardening department – something that will grow before your very eyes! And at this time of the year that's a tall order, which is where 'hippeastrums' come in.

Amaryllis is their other name & they produce flowers of tremendous spectacle from fat & dormant bulbs with very little trouble. Just go easy on the watering! You will find the bulbs now – loose or in cardboard boxes – at your local nursery or garden centre, a popular Christmas present guaranteed to add a level of character, cheer & charm inside the house during dreary winter days. The immense red and white blooms are well-suited for Christmas gifts and the showy blossoms enhance holiday decorations.



Amaryllis: A Tale of True Love and Horticultural Wonder

Greek mythology brings us the story of Amaryllis, a love-struck maiden who longed for the handsome but cold-hearted Alteo. Desperate to win his love, she pierced her heart with a golden arrow and then visited his cottage daily, shedding drops of blood along the way. On the thirtieth day, beautiful scarlet flowers bloomed along the path. Alteo was enamoured, Amaryllis' heart was healed, and our favourite holiday bloom got its name. That is, until it was reclassified in the 1800s under the genus *Hippeastrum*. Whatever you call them (and we'll call them amaryllis here), these dramatic tropical blooms herald the holidays with a natural beauty that only a living plant can bring.

Here are 12 things you might not know about amaryllis:

- Native to Peru and South Africa, the genus *Amaryllis* comes from the Greek word 'amarysso', which means "to sparkle."
- *Hippeastrum* is derived from the Greek words for horse and star.
- In nature, amaryllis bloom in spring or summer, but are commonly forced into early bloom for the holidays.
- The U.S. imports more than 10 million amaryllis bulbs every year, mainly from Holland and South Africa.
- Plant breeders have developed more than 600 named varieties!
- Amaryllis reproduce by growing "daughter" bulbs next to the "mother" bulbs.
- It takes three to five years for a daughter bulb to reach a marketable size.
- You can grow amaryllis from seed, but it can take up to six years for them to reach maturity and produce flowers.
- Amaryllis make dramatic and long-lasting cut flowers.
- The genus *Hippeastrum* has yielded several substances with medically useful properties, one of which has shown promise as a treatment for Alzheimer's disease.
- The amaryllis commonly means determination, beauty, and love. The Victorians associated amaryllis with strength and determination because of their height and sturdiness. Amaryllis can also mean success, and are commonly given as gifts of hard-won achievement.
- Bulbs were brought to Europe in the 1700s and have been known to bloom for up to 75 years.

THE UGLIEST THING I EVER PLANTED

Sometimes the glory we hope to see is found where we least expect it.

If all I had known of the amaryllis plant was its bulb, I am sure I would never have potted one at all!

But first impressions matter, and my first impression of an amaryllis, given to me as a Christmas present, was rich colour and diamond sparkle and my own astonishment.

Back to the bulb - spring-blooming bulbs, like daffodil & crocus bulbs, are papery like onions and small.

An amaryllis bulb, however, is a two-fisted beast. But cover the monster in dirt, water it, and place it on your windowsill & watch as the water and winter sunshine awaken a bulb that looks as dead as stone.

When you place your blooming amaryllis in the centre of your dining-room table at Christmastime,

remember the tale of the Greek shepherdess who shed her blood to prove her love. The Greek shepherdess foreshadows our own Great Shepherd. And what was the world's first impression of Christ?

A mother pregnant well before her wedding, an animal feed trough, a small and vulnerable infant. The mystery of the gospel was revealed to us in flesh that would bleed for us, yes - but that flesh came barefoot and caked with dust. It was not a good first impression, and if I had passed the scene on a dusty road in Bethlehem, I may not have looked twice.

However, when the amaryllis bulb finally erupts with new life, the sight is astonishing. A pale green stalk, the colour of celery and the shape of a sword, pushes itself up. One inch, then two, it is six inches high before you know it. When the flower opens a few weeks later, what was once hidden is finally revealed. And what is revealed is the kind of beauty that drops your jaw and stops your tracks. You cannot help but look twice. And then go on looking.

I have always wondered why such a glory and a gift as Emmanuel didn't simply appear, a fully grown God-man, trailing rainbows rather than dust. Would that have helped us recognize Him? Perhaps not. We might have needed to see something more mysterious. Maybe we needed to witness the mystery of heavenly glory emerging from the dust of earth? And what a beautiful, magnificent revelation – let's mark the days to Jesus's birth with excitement & awe. It is fair to say, we're all a bit uncertain about what Christmas is going to be like this year - & perhaps we're feeling a bit anxious about this. But, in whatever way we celebrate Christmas, the Christmas message of Emmanuel – the good news that God is with us – feels perhaps more pertinent than ever before in this extraordinary year.