

HIPPEASTRUMS

Hippeastrums, also known as Amaryllis, are native to tropical areas of South America. They enjoy growing in a constant mild temperature around 20°C, and in dappled shade. This makes them ideal houseplants and they are one of the most spectacular bulbs for indoor flowering.

PLANTING

Hippeastrum bulbs are generally available from September onwards. If planted at that time they will flower about seven weeks later, near the end of November. The longer you delay planting, the quicker the bulb will rush into bloom – bulbs planted in late November will flower in three weeks and look magnificent at Christmas. It is not recommended to delay planting beyond mid December.

When purchased, the bulbs will have thick fleshy roots, and these should be handled carefully to avoid damage. Plant the bulbs in a pot at least 150mm diameter.

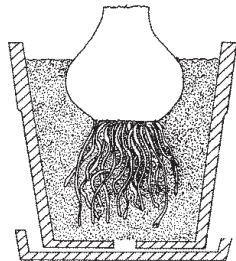
Use a good quality potting mixture that contains a six-month slow release fertiliser. Plant the bulb with the top third above the mixture, making sure that the roots are well spread out and have no air pockets where the mixture is missing.

After planting, water well with tepid water. Do not water over the nose of the bulb.

CARE WHILE GROWING

While the bulb is growing, use tepid water sparingly to keep the mixture just moist, not wet. Do not allow water to sit in a tray underneath the pot. If you have used a good mixture with slow release fertiliser then no additional fertilising is required.

Keep the pot in a warm room, in full light. Rotate the pot occasionally as the leaves and flower stem start to appear, to prevent them bending towards the light.



FLOWERING

Depending on when you planted the bulb, the flower will be in full bloom three to seven weeks after planting.

At this time, remove the pot from direct sun to extend the life of the flower and continue to water to keep the mixture just moist.

AFTER FLOWERING

When the flower is spent, remove the stem as close as possible to its base. Feed with liquid fertiliser now, as the bulb needs to be well fed for the next few months to be able to flower well next season.

Keep watering the bulb until late autumn. The thick green leaves make it an attractive plant to have in the house even after flowering. New leaves will continue to grow as the bulb grows throughout summer and autumn.

RE-FLOWERING

Flowering in Hippeastrum bulbs is initiated by a stress period of cool conditions or dry conditions. This is why new bulbs always flower well in their first season; they have been stored dry for some weeks prior to being available for sale. The stress period must be at least ten weeks to be effective.

These conditions can be provided by withholding water from the plant from the beginning of May to the end of July. By this time the plant may have lost some older leaves, but this is not a problem. Re-pot the bulb into fresh mixture at the start of August and follow the growing instructions above.

Alternatively, place the potted bulb outdoors for the winter months, in a position protected from frosts. They will probably lose most of their leaves during this time, and become dormant. Re-pot and bring indoors at the start of August.

Both methods should result in flowers in November.

