Add color in the winter with amaryllis bulbs

Now that most of the leaves have already changed colors and fallen from the trees, the Oklahoma landscape will look rather gray and bleak until spring. Fortunately, if gardeners get started right away, they can force amaryllis bulbs to bloom in just a few weeks to add some bright color throughout the rest of the winter months.

One great aspect of these bulbs is, if properly cared for, they’ll bloom for many years. Check with your local garden center or greenhouse for what are known as prepared or prechilled bulbs. Look for a large, plum bulb that still has a root system at the base. Avoid bulbs with blemishes or mold. Gardeners who have bulbs from the previous season can use them now as long as they were stored in a dry location and are free of mold.

There is some debate about forcing bulbs in water or soil. Soil is a better choice since it minimizes the chances of any rot forming on the bulb. It’s easy for fungal damage to occur when forcing bulbs in water.

Plant it in a pot not much bigger than the bulb itself. You want it to have a little room around the edges, but it should be a snug fit. Despite their massive blooms and tall stems, the bulbs don’t need a lot of room in the pot. Make sure to choose a pot that drains well.

Next, partially fill the pot with potting soil mix and place the bulb so the top third of it will be exposed after filling in the sides with potting soil. Keep in mind these flowers can be top-heavy and fall over. It’s a great idea to place a bamboo stake alongside the bulbs as are you’re filling the container with soil. This will help avoid damage to the root system or the bulb later on, as well as help support those leggy leaves and the stem.

Water the bulb in very lightly so the soil mix is damp. Place the pot in a warm location that features a lot of natural, indirect light. Keep the soil moist but be careful not to overwater once leaves begin to appear.

A handy way to water and avoid making a mess is to water the plants in the sink. Place the plant in the sink and run cool water slowly until it pools slightly in the pot. Wait for the excess water to drain out the hole in the bottom of the pot. Feed the amaryllis with a slow-release or liquid fertilizer two to four times per month. As the flowers fade, carefully cut them off. Once all of the flowers have faded, cut the entire stalk back to the base.
If you want to try something new and different, consider growing amaryllis bulbs that have been encased in wax. These bulbs don’t need a pot, water or soil. Just place them in a bright spot in your home and they’ll bloom. The waxed bulb holds all the stored energy and water it needs to grow and bloom. Be sure to rotate it every couple of days to help it grow straighter.

These bulbs can make a great holiday gift because they basically require no care, so they’re perfect for those with no green thumb.

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