Amaryllis (Hippeastrum)

POTTING THE BULBS: Pot bulbs individually in 6-7in pots or group 3 bulbs together in a 10-12in container. Fill the pot about half full with potting mix, set the bulb on top of the mix and fill in around the bulb with additional mix. Adjust the position of the bulb as needed, so that the top third of the bulb is exposed. The final level of the mix should be about 1/2in below the rim of the pot to allow for watering. Firm the mix and water lightly to settle it around the bulbs. Then follow the "Pre-bloom Care" instructions below.

PRE-BLOOM CARE OF AMARYLLIS: Place the pot where the temperature remains above 60°F. The warmer the temperature (70-80°F night and day is ideal), the faster the bulb will sprout and grow. Providing bottom heat (by setting the pot on a propagation mat or on the top of a refrigerator) may help stimulate growth. Water only when the top inch of the potting mix is dry to the touch. Watering more frequently, particularly just after potting, can cause the bulb to rot. (If the pot is covered with Spanish Moss, lift the moss and pour water directly on the potting mix.)

Growth generally begins in 2-8 weeks. Certain varieties of Amaryllis may take more time to sprout. As long as your bulb remains firm, be patient and take care not to overwater. Provide ample sunshine (a south-facing window or a sunroom) as soon as the bulb sprouts. Rotate the pot frequently to prevent the flower stalks from leaning toward the light.

REBUILDING THE BULB: After flowering, your bulb is exhausted. If you want flowers next year (many people prefer simply to purchase new bulbs every fall), you must allow it to rebuild itself. After the last bloom fades, cut off the flower stalk 3-5 inches above the bulb, BUT DO NOT CUT THE LEAVES OFF. THEY PRODUCE FOOD THAT WILL BE STORED IN THE BULB. Put your plant in a sunny window (a south-facing one is best), water when the top inch of the potting mix is dry to the touch, and begin fertilizing with a balanced, water-soluble fertilizer once a month. When the danger of frost has passed in spring, set the pot outdoors in full sun or knock the bulb out of its pot and plant it in the ground in a sunny location. In fall -- we often wait until frost blackens the leaves -- bring the bulb indoors, cut the foliage off just above the bulb, and store it dry in a cool (55°F), dark place such as a basement for 8-10 weeks. Then pot (or repot) the bulb and water it. Thereafter, keep the potting mix almost dry until new growth emerges, and follow the instructions under "Pre-bloom Care."

GROWING AMARYLLIS IN STONES AND WATER: These large bulbs will grow happily and bloom abundantly in nothing more than stones and water. To "plant" your bulb, begin by carefully placing river stones or pebbles to a depth of about 4 inches in a Vase or Bulb Vase or your own clear glass planter. With scissors, trim off any roots on the bulb that are brown and dried*, but let the roots that are whitish and fleshy remain. Place the Amaryllis bulb, roots down, on top of the stones, then put the remaining stones around the bulb, leaving the top third of the bulb exposed. Finally, add water until the level reaches about 1in below the base of the bulb but no higher. If the base of the bulb sits in water, it will rot.

After planting, set the container on a sunny windowsill in a room where the temperature remains above 60°F. The warmer the temperature (70-80°F night and day is ideal), the faster the bulb will sprout and grow. Check the water level daily. Add water as needed to keep the level below the base of the bulb. A shoot will emerge from the top of the bulb in 2-8 weeks; you may (or may not) see thick white roots pushing between the stones before then. Rotate the container frequently to prevent the flower stalks from leaning toward the light. After the last blooms fade, we recommend that you dispose of the bulb; Amaryllis grown in water may not perform well in subsequent years. However, if you do wish to continue growing the bulb, follow the instructions given in "Potting the Bulbs" and "Rebuilding the Bulb."

*We recommend trimming dried roots off because they will decompose in water over time. Adding aquarium charcoal to the river stones will also help prevent any odors.