

**Norm's Notes**  
**Amaryllis and Poinsettia**  
**Holiday House Plants**

Now that you have gotten an amaryllis or poinsettia, you may want to keep the plants for another year. Both need a little care beyond watering and fertilizing. But the reward is to have the plants propagate and live indefinitely.

Amaryllis, often listed by their true botanical name, *Hippeastrum*, are a group of about 80 species native to Central and South America. Nevertheless, it is a group called Dutch hybrids that are a cross of two species and one hybrid that are the ones usually grown as a jaw-dropping houseplant with their extravagant flowers ranging in color from white through the pink and red spectrum. Many come as bicolors, and some are double flowered. If the bulbs of the plants have been correctly nurtured, they will first have a flower stalk emerge from the bulb after being planted for about 2-3 weeks. The huge bulbs of about 3 inches in diameter and costing about \$10.00 for common varieties, should be planted with only 2/3rds of the bulb planted in loose potting soil. Water only occasionally, not having the soil either be soaked nor dry but only moist. The pot should be about 2 inches larger than the width of the bulb. Nevertheless, sometimes long leaves will sometimes emerge first, and with patience the flower stem will eventually follow. Two or three flower stems are not uncommon and each stem will have about 3-4 flowers 5 inches across, blooming for over a month. The flowers last longer if kept in a cool part of the home with subdued light. The plants prefer filtered sunlight but remain happy with 4 hours of direct sunlight each day. Typically, the bulbs are sold in October for flowering over the holiday season. But the flowering period can be changed depending upon when the plant is allowed to rest for 3 months. Growers allow the plant to have their green leaves until the end of June. During the last month water is withheld. The leaves are cut off and the bulb stored in a cool (less than 50 degrees F) and dry location. I store the bulb and pot in the refrigerator for the 3 months. It is because the bulbs resent transplanting for 3-4 years that the pot is stored with the bulb. Mixing some bone meal in with the soil is recommended in addition to applying a little balanced fertilizer when watering. The bone meal encourages the bulb's development. In a year the large bulb will usually develop 2 or more bulbs. The new bulbs can be left with the parent for several years before separating them from the parent. Naturally, you would want to move the bulb to a larger pot without disturbing the native soil.



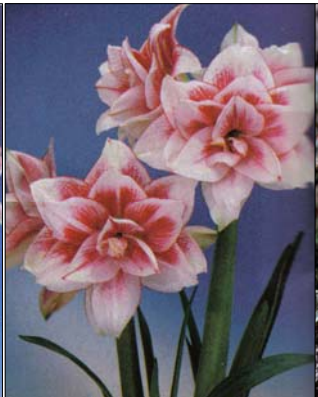
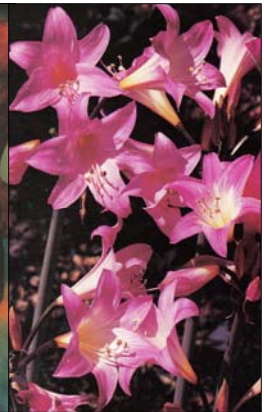
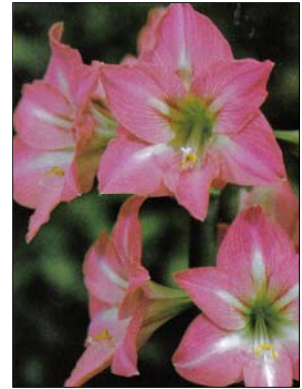
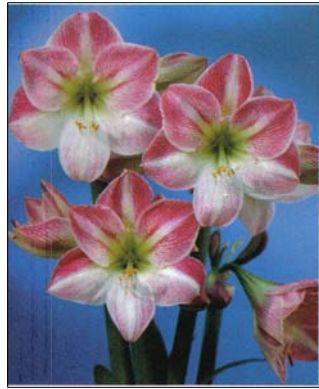
For ordering unusual and not often found double flowered varieties of amaryllis (along with other bulb plants), I especially like the McClure and Zimmerman catalog, (1-800-883-6998). It has few pictures, and only some line drawings, but the selection is wide and well described.

Amaryllis is rather forgiving of not following the above suggestions. They can forego the 3 month rest period and will bloom when they feel ready. As with house plants it is helpful to generously flush the soil every couple of months to reduce the buildup of mineral salts resulting from fertilizing.

Poinsettias, which are a *Euphorbia* species, have a more particular cultivation regime. They, like amaryllis, have the same water and light requirements, though ideally they prefer a little less water. After the holidays the flowers (actually bracts or modified leaves) will fall off. Then allow the soil to nearly dry out. In about April, resume one generous watering and the plant will continue to grow. At this time you can cut back the plant to about 2-3 inches or take stem cutting for more plants. Allow the stem cuttings to lay out for several hours so the milky sap will seal the stem. Take off the bottom 3-4 leaves, dip the stem that will be below the soil line in a rooting hormone, and then plant and water in potting soil. The parent plant will branch out and the stem cuttings, if pinched off after a month, will also branch off. The parent plant need not be planted in a larger pot unless you want a larger plant. With too large a pot the plant will only grow leaves at the expense of flowers. Continue to water and fertilize letting the soil lightly dry out between watering. Now comes the critical part. In mid September be sure you give the plant 8-10 hours of complete darkness. Even a little light during the dark daily period will break the formation of new flowers. In December with fully formed flowers a normal household light and night dark period will be fine. Obviously, the strict 3 month period of total darkness is difficult in many households, but if you can and want to do this, your poinsettias will flower every year.

## Amaryllis

To the right are the two most widely available Dutch hybrids today. Below are other varieties offered to the home gardener.



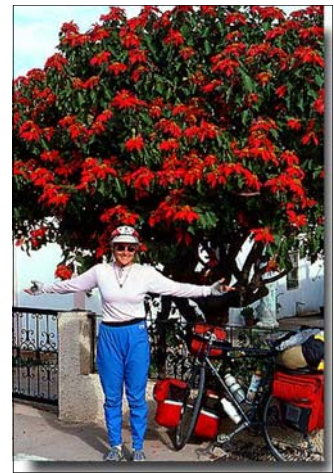
## POINSETTIAS

The photos to your left and below show some of the plants grown right here in a Montana greenhouse for the delight of visitors and customers.



Poinsettias are actually shrubs that can grow to 10 feet in their native Mexican habitat.

Below are a few of the colors and combinations of poinsettias available today.



Poinsettias today come in a wide variety of colors in red, pink, and white range ... and many as bicolors. The most common red is shown below and the white with the pink picotee is pictured next to the common red.