

Forcing Bulbs for Winter Enjoyment
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Forcing bulbs is a good way to bring the garden indoors during the winter. Tulips, crocus, hyacinth, and daffodils can be grown in this way to produce wonderfully fragrant flowers during the coldest part of winter. To force these bulbs it is essential that they receive a cold treatment to promote flowering once the bud has been formed in the bulb. However, there is another bulb that is forced and can be purchased in most garden centers, home stores, and discount stores.

In the *amaryllidaceae* family, amaryllis is in the genus *Hippeastrum* which includes daffodils, snowdrops, and spider lilies. Since they are native to the tropical areas of South America amaryllis prefer to be grown in warmer temperatures (70 to 75 degree F) for 9 or 10 months followed by cooler temperatures (55 degrees) for 2 or 3 months. When shopping look for large bulbs (greater than 8 inches) as these will produce 2 to 6 flowers per stalk. Flowers come in many colors including red, white, pink, orange, salmon, and even multicolored. Plant heights range from 18 to 36 inches tall depending on the cultivar and growing conditions they receive.

Plant your newly purchased bulb in a 6 inch standard pot using a well-drained potting soil (half peat/half perlite works well). Water thoroughly at planting but allow drying out slightly before adding more water. Be careful to not over water. Fertilize using a complete fertilizer 2 - 4 times per month. Deadhead any spent flowers to keep the plant from producing seed. You can plant your amaryllis outdoors in the spring after the danger of frost is past. Of course you will have to bring it in again in the fall.

If the bulb size is sufficient you can force flowering again next year. Place the bulb at a temperature of 55 degrees for 8 to 10 weeks. Then replant as you would a newly purchased bulb. After a couple of years your bulb will produce bulblets (small bulbs at the base of the main bulb). These can be removed and potted to make more plants or you can repot the entire plant in a larger pot and put on a spectacular flower show when the new bulbs produce flowers.

A few insects and diseases that can be problematic on amaryllis include mites, thrips, mealybugs, and Red Spot disease. Keep an eye out for any problems and treat as needed. In some cases it may be best to just start over as bulbs are readily available and easy to grow.

More information on horticultural topics can be found by visiting us online 24 hours a day at <http://www.co.pennington.sd.us/extension/extsvc.html>, or by calling 605-394-2188 or emailing me at ricky.abrahamson@sdstate.edu.