

**Friday's Feature**

By

**Theresa Friday**

April 23, 2007

**Amaryllis bulbs perform well in Northwest Florida gardens**

Few flowering bulbs can surpass the stately beauty of the amaryllis. Blooming typically in April, this popular bulb is a star performer in the spring garden. Amaryllis is one of the best adapted bulbs for the northern Gulf Coast.

The flowers of amaryllis make striking additions to the landscape in spring. They can be used effectively as foundation plantings to make a pleasing contrast to nearby evergreen shrubbery. Other uses for amaryllis include plantings in terraces close to the house, in tree islands, near a gate entrance, and in borders. Amaryllis are most effective when grown in clumps of ten plants or more of the same color.

Amaryllis is normally started in the garden by planting large bulbs. The ideal time to plant them is in September. If planted in beds, prepare the soil by mixing in large quantities of organic amendments. Set the bulbs so that the top of the bulb is just covered with soil and the neck of the bulb is protruding above the ground. When planting in containers, pot so that half of the bulb is above the potting mix.

Amaryllis are tropical plants, originating in South America. The growth and amount of flowering is regulated by bulb size, temperature and moisture. Two to six flowers are produced per stalk, and big, healthy bulbs sometimes have two flower stalks.



Gardeners growing amaryllis in their gardens know just how carefree they are. They thrive in any reasonably good garden soil as long as drainage is good. A spot that receives part sun (about six hours of direct sun and then shade in the afternoon) is the ideal location. However, many amaryllis thrive in full sun to part shade. Once planted and established, amaryllis can be left alone for several years. It is not necessary to dig each year or to "dry off" as once believed.

General care includes a light sprinkling of all-purpose fertilizer in March and again in June. Use a special bulb fertilizer or apply one pound of 6-6-6 or an equivalent amount of other complete fertilizers per 100 square feet of bed.

Water is crucial for amaryllis growth. It is important that the soil is kept moderately moist during times of growth and flowering. Frequency of watering will depend greatly on soil type, time of year and weather conditions.

Beds should be mulched with about two inches of pine straw, leaves or other similar material to help reduce weeds and conserve moisture. Increase the thickness of the mulch to three or four inches during the winter to help protect the bulbs from freeze damage.

A good cultural practice is to remove dead blooms before seeds are produced. Flowering in the following season will be reduced considerably if seeds are allowed to set. Removing dead blooms also helps to maintain the aesthetic value of the planting and may prevent disease problems.

The life of blooms may be prolonged by removing anthers, thereby preventing pollination and subsequent seed set. Anthers are male plant organs that are recognizable as long yellow filaments sticking out from within the flower.

Theresa Friday is the Residential Horticulture Extension Agent for Santa Rosa County. The use of trade names, if used in this article, is solely for the purpose of providing specific information. It is not a guarantee, warranty, or endorsement of the product name(s) and does not signify that they are approved to the exclusion of others. For additional information about all of the county extension services and other articles of interest go to: <http://www.santarosa.fl.gov/extension>