



Grow Your Own Holiday Bulb Bouquets!

by Cecile Garrison, Master Gardener

It's amazing what you can achieve with a bunch of bulbs that look like onions or just one huge bulb that can produce four or five majestic blooms on one sturdy stalk! Let me tell you a few easy steps toward stunning displays for your patio, yard or party room for the holiday season.

I think the easiest bulbs to use for these potted bouquets are white or yellow narcissus. I started some in water as a demonstration three years ago. They put out roots, grew tall and bloomed right on cue. I used a shallow, clear glass bowl so the roots would be visible as well as the stems and blooms above the water. I placed clear glass marbles in the bottom of the dish, positioned a dozen bulbs on top of the marbles, poured water to cover the bottom one quarter of the bulbs then placed more clear marbles to provide stability as the stems grew. I kept the water at the same level through the bloom cycle. When all the blooms were finished, I simply separated the bulbs and planted them in well draining soil in the garden. They are the first bulbs to emerge and bloom each December.

The Amaryllis bulbs you see in stores and garden centers during the fall season are also easy to turn into a stunning holiday display. Purchase at least one bulb and treat yourself and others to a horticultural magic show. This year I plan to grow a white one. If you are looking online you might find it under the botanical name of "Hippeastrum".

Open the package and ensure the bulb is firm, heavy and dry. It should have the same consistency of that perfect onion you seek for your hamburger. Reject bulbs that are soft or discolored. Store them in a cool, dark, dry place until six to eight weeks before you want them to bloom. Don't put Amaryllis bulbs in the refrigerator.

Invest in a heavy, shallow pot with a good drainage hole. I place a coffee filter or two over the hole to keep the potting mix in place. Multiple blooms on one stalk could make this plant top-heavy and tip over, if the pot is too small. A four inch diameter bulb needs a six inch pot. Three bulbs in a twelve or sixteen inch pot really make a statement.

Any good, well draining soilless potting mix will work for amaryllis. I buy one with fertilizer because I am notorious for ignoring plants once they are potted. The medium should be moistened prior to planting but not too wet!

Fill the pot halfway with the damp potting mix. Place bulbs so their bases have firm contact with the mix. Then fill the container until the bulb/bulbs are two-thirds covered and firm the mix. The top one half or one third of the bulb should be visible above the surface.

I like to hide the potting mix with rocks, marbles or peat moss. This is optional and can lead to forgetting to water the plant. Excessive water will kill the plant too. I depend on my trusty \$5.00 moisture meter to help me keep these potted plants on the low side of moist. Another tip is to avoid water on the bulb itself. We don't need to kill it with kindness!

Amaryllis like bright light but not direct sun. They grow and bloom faster if the home is quite warm, but the blooms will last longer if temperatures are below sixty-five. You might need to turn the pot frequently to keep the stalk growing straight. You might also need to stake it if it becomes top heavy. It takes six to eight weeks to see the blooms but it is well worth the wait!

Do not throw these beauties away after the holidays. Instead plant them outside in well drained soil. They tolerate our heat and frost conditions and usually thrive in this zone.

I hope you try at least one bulb display this holiday season. It sounds like a lot of work but it really isn't and you will not believe your eyes when you see the flower that looks even better than it did on the box.



November 3, 2011