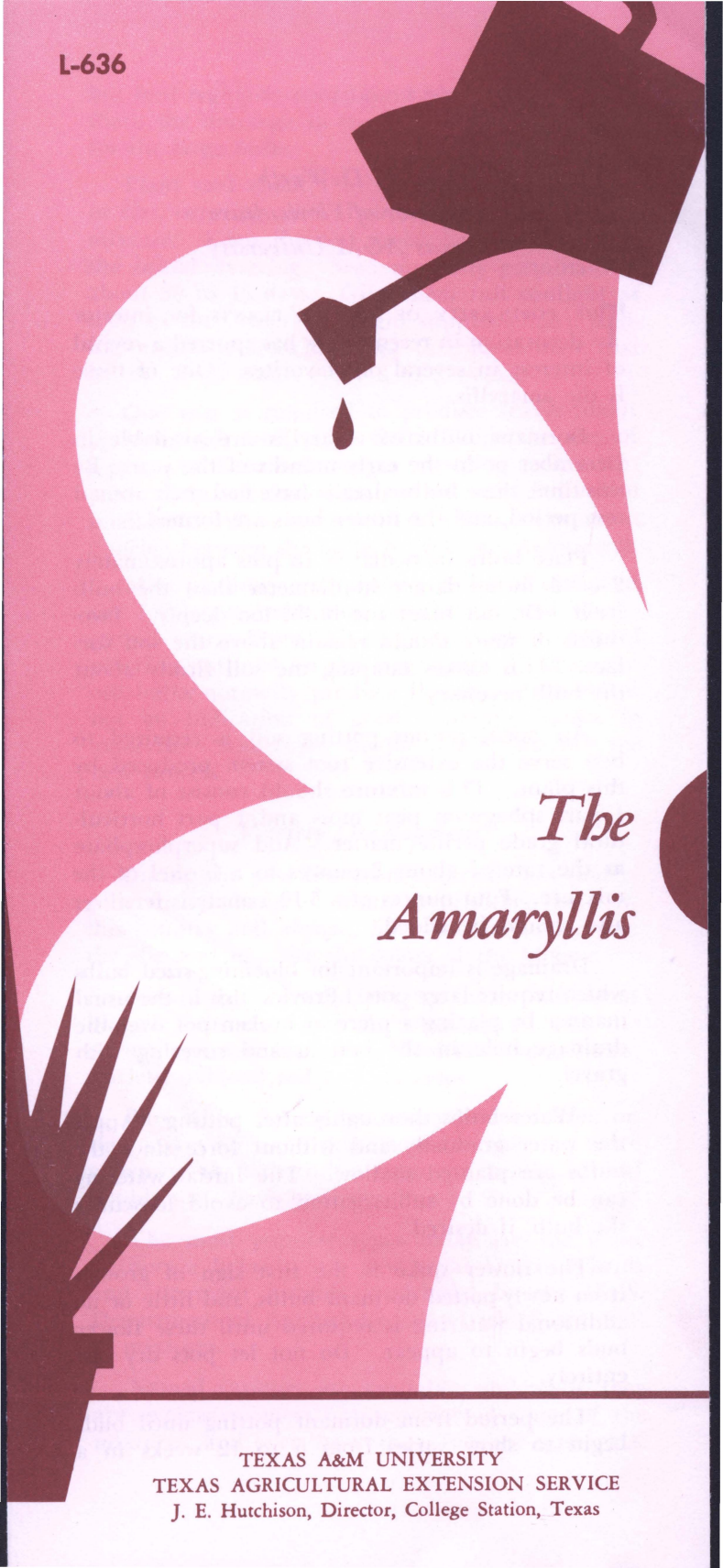


L-636



*The
Amaryllis*

TEXAS A&M UNIVERSITY
TEXAS AGRICULTURAL EXTENSION SERVICE
J. E. Hutchison, Director, College Station, Texas

The Amaryllis

A. F. DeWorth
Professor of Floriculture
Texas A&M University

THE POPULARITY OF FOLIAGE PLANTS for interior decoration in recent years has spurred a revival of interest in several old favorites. One of these is the amaryllis.

Dormant bulbs of amaryllis are available in December or in the early months of the year. By this time, these bulbs already have had their annual rest period, and the flower buds are formed.

Place bulbs immediately in pots approximately 2 or 3 inches larger in diameter than the bulb itself. Do not plant the bulbs too deeply. Two-thirds or more should remain above the soil surface. This makes tamping the soil firmly about the bulb necessary.

An open, porous potting soil is required to best serve the extensive root system produced by this plant. This mixture should consist of about 1 part sphagnum peat moss and 1 part horticultural grade perlite matter. Add superphosphate at the rate of about 2 ounces to a bushel of the mixture. Four ounces of a 5-10-5 analysis fertilizer also should be added.

Drainage is important for blooming-sized bulbs which require large pots. Provide this in the usual manner by placing a piece of broken pot over the drainage hole in the bottom and covering with gravel.

Water bulbs thoroughly after potting. Apply the water gradually and without force since the bulbs are planted shallow. The initial watering can be done by subirrigation to avoid loosening the bulb, if desired.

The flower spike is the first sign of growth from newly-potted dormant bulbs, and little or no additional watering is required until these flower buds begin to appear. Do not let pots dry out entirely.

The period from dormant potting until buds begin to show varies from 6 to 12 weeks in a

favorable temperature of 55 degrees F. Sunlight is not necessary during this time and pots can be kept in a moist, dark place until the buds show. When the flower buds begin growth, maintain a 60 degree F. temperature, and water plants regularly. As growth continues, the amount of water required increases accordingly.

Feeding

While the flower stem is elongating, follow regular feeding with a complete liquid fertilizer every 2 to 3 weeks. Dry feeds of mixtures such as 5-10-5 fertilizers can be substituted at the rate of 1/2 teaspoon to a 6-inch pot.

Once the flower stalk begins growth, it develops rapidly. Older and larger bulbs may send up several flower spikes, each bearing two to five flaring, trumpet-shaped, lily-like flowers which will last a considerable time if kept out of a hot-dry atmosphere. These blooms may appear before the thick, broad, strap-shaped leaves develop.

Successful amaryllis culture from year to year begins at this stage, since the first step is to produce a good crop of healthy foliage. Continue frequent feedings after blooming. Keep plants well watered, and give them abundant light during this growth period.

Dormancy

When the foliage stops growing, it will tend to die down. Gradually discontinue watering until the soil in the pot is thoroughly dry. When the leaves have dried or shriveled, store the pots in a cool, dry place.

Two methods commonly are followed in handling the bulbs during this dormancy. The first is to leave the bulbs in the pots as mentioned until growth starts again and then follow the procedure as already outlined. The second method is to plunge the pots up to the rim in soil outdoors in a moderately shady location.

In the second method, little care is required during the summer. Plants then can be forced in the same manner as outlined, starting in late fall or early winter.

Frequently, large healthy amaryllis bulbs will flower more than once a year. Should this occur,

always follow the aforementioned procedure—water and feed as growth progresses; as dormancy approaches, decrease watering; and cease feedings until it becomes dormant.

Contrary to common practice with other perennial plants and bulbs, do not repot amaryllis annually, because they produce their best and largest blooms when severely potbound.

In time, older bulbs will produce offsets. These can be removed and planted in small pots and grown until they reach flowering size. Remove from the pot old bulbs that have produced these offsets. Do not disturb the root system any more than necessary while removing the offset. The old bulb can then be repotted carefully.

Seed Propagation

Amaryllis also are propagated easily from seed which can be purchased or gathered from plants which have been allowed to develop seed-pods. Hybrid seeds of this plant always produce interesting variations. The seed are large, flat and black, and may be planted at any time. During the winter, bottom heat is required for germination.

Seed are sown best in pots, pans or flats with plenty of drainage, as outlined for potting. Careful soil preparation is essential to good germination and for a suitable environment for the seedling roots, since they remain in this soil for at least a year. Use the same soil mixture used for potting,

*A refined
amaryllis
variety. Scapes
24-26 inches
tall bear blooms
8½-9 inches
tall.*



but feed regularly with liquid fertilizer for success. Place the drainage in the pot or flat as outlined for the large bulbs.

Plant seed about 1 inch apart in the pot, pan or flat, covering with about $\frac{1}{4}$ -inch sifted potting mixture. Keep the soil moist but not wet after the initial watering. Seed normally germinate in about 30 to 45 days. Give them full sunlight as soon as they emerge. Begin supplementary feedings regularly from the time they form their first leaves. Feed about every 2 to 3 weeks.

One year is required to produce leaves about $\frac{1}{2}$ inch wide and small bulbs about the size of a pea. As these bulbs begin crowding each other, prick them off into flats or pot into individual small pots. When transplanted to flats, allow about 2 inches between the bulbs for future development.

Most seedlings will produce bulbs of sufficient size for larger individual pots at the end of the second year. From this stage on, follow cultural practices outlined for the large bulbs. Three-year-old bulbs normally produce flowers. Bulb size is not an indication of good blooming habits in amaryllis. Sometimes smaller bulbs produce the best flowers.

Variety Development

During the past few years amaryllis has undergone many changes. Many hybridizers, both in this country and abroad, have worked to increase the size and improve the colors of the blooms.

Show specimens today often have individual blooms measuring over 8 inches across, and the color range now includes self-colors of vermillions, scarlets, oxblood red and crimsons.

Pure white flowers on amaryllis have been on the market for some time; however, they are more expensive than the other types. Recently, several double sorts have been developed.

The most popular types today are the giant California hybrids, the new royal Dutch hybrids and the giant hybrids introduced by the U. S. Department of Agriculture, all of which are sold in mixtures.

Named varieties are available, and while they are expensive, most are superior to some of the mixtures; and over the years, offsets are numerous.

Amaryllis halli, amaryllis belladonna and lycoris radiata and squamigera (which are often called amaryllis) are used widely in Texas for garden planting for fall bloom in outdoor areas. They are left in the ground from year to year, being dug only for division after several years in the same location.

Amaryllis Blight

The only major disease of amaryllis is amaryllis blight or red fire disease, characterized by small red spots on the bulbs and foliage, followed later by twisted and deformed stems and foliage.

Discard badly infected bulbs. Control light infestations by careful application of the following hot-water treatment. Immerse bulbs in hot water at a temperature of 104 degrees F. for 30 minutes. Do this a day or two before planting when the bulbs are dormant.

Carefully examine bulbs for an indication of this disease. Amaryllis become reddened when injured, however, red color in itself is not an indication of red fire disease.