

If you are looking for a last minute Christmas gift for that hard to shop for person, think about getting them a potted amaryllis kit. Amaryllis come in just about any color and provides a delightful decoration to the home during the long North Dakota winters. It takes about 6 to 12 weeks from when the bulb starts to grow until it blooms. Therefore, if you start to grow the bulb at Christmas, it will bloom sometime between mid-February and early March.

When an amaryllis is purchased as a potted kit, all you need for them to grow is water and sunlight. Water the pot thoroughly when the top soil is dry to the touch, but make sure to not overwater the bulb either. Overwatering the bulb will cause the roots to rot and eventually plant death. As the bulb begins to grow and produce more roots, the plant will use more water and will dry out faster. So be sure to adjust watering to compensate for the increase in water use.

After several weeks of growth, the bud will begin to emerge. The bud will usually, but not always, appear before the foliage. Once the growth of the bud and foliage has begun, rotate the container daily to prevent the plant from leaning toward the light. Plants will occasionally require staking to keep the flower stalk in an upright position. To stake the plant, gently insert a stake into the soil, using care not to injure the bulb, and then carefully tie the stalk to the stake. Stakes may also be inserted at planting time.

There are a few tricks you can try to help prolong the blooming period of an amaryllis. Once the flowers have opened, use a tweezers to remove the yellow anthers inside the flower before they shed pollen. This may extend the flower bloom by several days. Also, once the plant is in full bloom, move the plant to a cooler room (55-65 degrees) at night and keep the plant out of direct sunlight during the day. Large bulbs may send up two or three additional flower stalks.

Once the plant has finished blooming, remove the withered flower stalk with a sharp knife near the neck of the bulb. Do not cut off any foliage, because the leaves are needed for photosynthesis to replenish food reserves in the bulb. It is essential to keep the foliage growing vigorously, because after flowering the bulb initiates flower buds for next year's bloom. For more information, contact the Steele County Extension office at 701-524-2253 or [alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu](mailto:alicia.harstad@ndsu.edu). NDSU is an equal opportunity institution.