Selecting and Growing Amaryllis for the Holidays

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Amaryllis are the perfect holiday flower, with beautiful blooms, fast growth and bright colors. They’re an excellent, pretty addition to your celebration, but what type should you choose, and how do you get them to bloom at the right time?

When should an amaryllis bulb be planted in order for the amaryllis to be in bloom for the holiday season?

An amaryllis bulb usually blooms about six to eight weeks after planting. Plant the bulb in early November if you want the amaryllis to be in bloom for the holiday season.

What types of amaryllis are available?

Home gardeners can choose from single-flowering, double-flowering, and miniature amaryllis varieties (cultivars). Flower colors include red, pink, orange, salmon, white and bicolors. Excellent single-blooming cultivars include ‘Apple Blossom’ (white with pink feathering), ‘Christmas Gift’ (white with a green throat), ‘Minerva’ (red with white star), ‘Orange Sovereign’ (orange), ‘Picotee’ (white with red edge), and ‘Red Lion’ (deep crimson red). ‘Aphrodite’ (white with pinkish red feathering), ‘Blossom Peacock’ (rose-red with white throat and midrib), ‘Dancing Queen’ (red and white striped) and ‘White Nymph’ (white) are available double-flowering cultivars.

Miniature cultivars include ‘Baby Star’ (deep red with a white star center), ‘Fairytale’ (white with raspberry red stripes), ‘Green Goddess’ (white with green center) and ‘Neon’ (fuchsia pink with a white throat).

How do you pot up an amaryllis bulb?

When planting an amaryllis bulb, select a pot which is approximately one to two inches wider than the diameter of the bulb. The container may be clay, ceramic or plastic, but should have drainage holes in the bottom. Plant the bulb in a well-drained potting soil. Place a small amount of potting soil in the bottom of the pot. Set the bulb in the center of the pot. Then add additional potting soil, firming it around the roots and bulb. When finished potting, the upper one-half of the bulb should remain above the soil surface. Also, leave about one inch between the soil surface and the pot’s rim. Then water well and place in a warm (70 to 75 degree Fahrenheit) location.

After the initial watering, allow the potting soil to dry somewhat before watering again. Keep the potting soil moist, but not wet. When growth appears, move the plant to a sunny window and fertilize every two to four weeks with a dilute fertilizer solution. During flower stalk elongation, rotate the plant each day to keep the flower stalk growing straight. Staking may be necessary if the flower stalk leans badly.
Flowering usually occurs about six to eight weeks after potting. When the amaryllis begins to bloom, move the plant to a slightly cooler (65 to 70 degree Fahrenheit) location that doesn’t receive direct sunlight to prolong the life of the flowers.

Iowa Owls

By Iowa Department of Natural Resources

All eight species of Iowa owls are found here in the winter. The great horned, screech and barred owls are most common. The short-eared is on the state endangered species list and the barn and long-eared are on the threatened list. If you glimpse one of these, you are lucky indeed.

Barred Owl - Very common, most often heard in summer, spring and fall. Search along forested areas in river bottoms across the state, except northwest Iowa.

Screech Owl - Common. Small, but slightly larger than a saw-whet owl. Found year-round in Iowa. Nocturnal, but will respond to calls day or night. Nests early spring and summer.

Burrowing Owl - The only owl that nests underground, often using old badger or fox dens. Most recorded sightings are in northwest Iowa.

Short-eared Owl - Endangered. A prairie species, find them hunting over open grasslands. A summer nester and one of the last to nest. “We have a small breeding number during the summer, but more short-ears are in Iowa during the winter, when they move south from prairie areas in Canada,” says Doug Harr, who heads the DNR’s nongame program.

Great Horned Owl - The largest and easiest owl to find, they hoot in a series of five or six in late December and January to attract mates. By following the sound, you can see them sitting in an old red-tailed hawk nest, incubating eggs, even during a snowstorm. Often lay eggs by early February. Their owlets take a long time to mature, so they are the earliest nesters, doing so to take advantage of an early food supply for their young. Owlets can hunt on their own by summer, perfect timing to catch early populations of rabbits and rodents.

Long-eared Owl - Threatened. Find in conifer groves in winter and sometimes in groups. The only owls that form flocks. Usually found in the same location year after year.

Snowy Owl - Not here during summer, when the all-white snowy resides in the Arctic. “They come down when the food base of lemmings and mice has a population crash,” says Harr. That happens about every four years. “Not responsive to calls, you will just happen upon them sitting on a fencepost or on a frozen clod of dirt in an open field. A ground nester, they like to get on a perch to scan for prey.” Most are found north of Interstate 80.

Northern Saw-Whet Owl - Our smallest owl, “Probably a lot more common than we realize, this owl is very secretive,” says Harr. Often found in winter in red cedar trees. They perch close to tree trunks and sometimes close to the ground. Unafraid of people, they can be approached within a few feet. “This is a species
that we are just starting to understand more about,” says Harr.

**Barn Owl - Threatened**, with less than ten known nests in the state. “There are probably more than that, but they are hard to find,” says Harr. An oak savannah species, they thrived when fire and natural free-roaming grazers such as elk kept the forest floor open, with knee-high grasses. A rare and quickly disappearing habitat, the oak forests are now often choked with above-head tangles of brush and woody plants. Barn owls have a distinctive heart-shaped facial shape. Often found in abandoned barns, they are a year-round resident and a spring and summer nester.

**Hedge Apples for Home Pest Control?**

By Laura Jesse and Donald Lewis
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“Hedge apple” trees (also called Osage orange, Maclura pomifera) are not related to apples or oranges and their fruit is inedible. The large, grapefruit-sized, brain-like green fruit are better-known than the trees and show up in the fall of the year in stores and farmers markets where they are sold for their purported ability to repel insects.

The hedge apple tree has a long and storied history and is native to Texas, Oklahoma and Arkansas region. The wood of these trees was prized by Native Americans. Hedge apple trees were used by early settlers as a living fence and were spread across the prairie and planted in hedges in the mid-1800s. This greatly expanded the distribution of hedge apple and is the reason they are still commonly found in wooded field borders.

The use of the hedge apples for insect control is one of the most enduring pest management home remedies. Claims abound that hedge apples around the foundation or inside the basement will repel boxelder bugs, crickets, spiders and other pests. Research conducted at Iowa State University has demonstrated that chemicals extracted from the fruit can be repellant to tested insects (German cockroaches, mosquitoes and houseflies). In addition, sliced hedge apples placed in enclosed, small spaces did repel insects. However, there is still no evidence that putting whole fruit around the house or in the basement will have any effect on insect pests. In large or open spaces there is so much air movement that whatever small amount of repellant chemical may be present it quickly dissipated. In addition the chemicals may not be repellant to all insects or to non-insects like spider, millipedes and centipedes.

We still don’t recommend the use of hedge apples for pest control. If you choose to try it, be aware that the milky juice present in the stems and fruit of the Osage-orange may cause irritation to the skin. Equal measures of skepticism and caution are advised!

**Beautiful Barriers- Creating a Living Snowfence**

By Rod Wilke
UNL Extension Educator

Photo by Joseph O'Brien, USDA Forest Service, Bugwood.org

The season’s first major snow storm and the accompanying troublesome snowdrifts remind us that that we should have taken the time to erect snow fence in the problem areas when the weather was pleasant and the soil unfrozen.

Snowdrifts in rural areas are particularly troublesome because of the miles of roads involved, and the time and money it takes to clear blocked stretches.

Farmstead and acreage owners are well aware of the inconvenience, time, and expense involved in clearing snowdrifts that block driveways and county roads. Slatted snow fence or similar such structural materials, when strategically placed, can effectively capture snow and prevent drifting onto susceptible areas. A more permanent and much more attractive alternative is to plant a ‘living’ snow fence that can enhance the landscape, provide food and shelter for wildlife, protect the environment, and offer a possible alternative income source….all while trapping and controlling snow-drift away from critical areas.

A living snow fence is comprised of trees and/or shrubs that becomes a protective vegetative barrier against the negative effects of wind-blown snow. This living fence can be planted as single or multiple rows and the plant species can be mixed to add color and variety to the landscape. A living snow fence with all shrubs can be a showcase of structure and color making for a beautiful addition along a road or driveway. In addition, mixed species can provide different kinds of food for birds and small game. There might be a demand in the immediate area for colorful and/or intriguing stems cut from selected mature shrubs during the early winter.
Living snow fences take a few years to establish a beneficial snow-trapping height and thickness as opposed to the instantaneous results from a slatted snow fence. However, the longevity of a snow fence can be many times greater than slats and is certainly more beneficial in terms of year-round beauty and environmental function.

A living snow fence can serve as a memorial to a family member, friend, or public servant. I’m reminded of a quarter-mile of conifers along a highway in my home county planted in memory of the landowner who was an avid conservationist. They were planted in an area that was formerly plagued with snow that drifted onto the state roadway. The planting eliminated the problem, added striking beauty to the landscape, and gave honor to one who cared.

A living snow fence may qualify for cost-share under the Continuous Conservation Reserve Program if planted into an area that has a previous cropping history. Check with your local county Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) or Farm Service Agency (FSA) office regarding this possibility. Most Natural Resources Districts are currently taking orders for trees and shrubs for planting next spring. They offer a wide selection of conifers, deciduous, fruit, and nut trees as well as a several species of shrubs.

Plan a beautiful way to stop the snow from drifting onto nearby county roads or across your driveway by planting living material that will be will pleasing aesthetically and environmentally beneficial.

Windbreak Establishment, http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/ec1764.pdf
Windbreaks for Rural Living, http://www.ianrpubs.unl.edu/sendIt/ec1767.pdf

Glenwood’s Giving Garden – 2014 Success!

By Nancy Crews
Horticulture Program
Mills County Extension and Outreach

The 2014 harvest numbers are in, and it was a record breaking season at Glenwood’s Giving Garden! Over 7,677 pounds of fresh vegetables were grown and distributed to people in need throughout the community with the help of Mills County Public Health and numerous volunteers. Thank you to everyone that contributed and volunteered! The garden would not be possible without the generosity and hard work of landowners June Focken and Carol McCormick and Mills County Master Gardeners, Mike and Lisa Dytrych. Congratulations to all on a successful year!

Properly Mulch Strawberries for Winter

By Rich Jauron and Greg Wallace
Department of Horticulture
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While winter is not growing season for strawberries, taking care of strawberry plants remains vitally important. Before winter arrives, mulch strawberries to protect them, so they’re ready to grow in the spring.

Here are some tips from Iowa State University Extension and Outreach horticulturists on the ins and outs about mulching strawberries for winter. To have additional questions answered, contact the ISU Hortline at 515-294-3108 or hortline@iastate.edu.

Should strawberries be mulched in fall?

Strawberries should be mulched in fall to prevent winter injury. Low temperatures and repeated freezing and thawing of the soil through the winter months are the main threats to strawberry plants. Temperatures below 20 degrees Fahrenheit may kill flower buds and damage the roots and crowns of unmulched plants. Repeated freezing and thawing of the soil can heave plants out of the ground, severely damaging or destroying the plants.

When should I mulch my strawberries?

Allow the strawberry plants to harden or acclimate to cool fall temperatures before mulching the planting. Applying mulch before the strawberry plants have properly hardened may make the plants more susceptible to winter injury. In northern Iowa, strawberries are normally mulched in early November. Gardeners in central and southern Iowa should mulch their strawberry plantings in mid-November and late November, respectively.

What materials are suitable for mulching strawberries?

Excellent mulching materials include clean, weed-free oat, wheat or soybean straw. Chopped cornstalks are another possibility. Apply approximately 3 to 5 inches of material. After settling, the mulch layer should be 2 to 4 inches thick.

In windy, exposed areas, straw mulches can be kept in
place by laying wire or plastic fencing over the mulch. The fencing can be held in place with bricks or other heavy objects.

**Are leaves a suitable mulch for strawberries?**

Leaves are not a good winter mulch for strawberries. Leaves can mat together in layers, trapping air and creating space for ice to form. The leaf, air and ice layers do not provide adequate protection. A leaf mulch may damage plants due to excess moisture trapped under the matted leaves.

**When should I remove the mulch on my strawberries?**

To reduce the chances of crop damage from a late frost or freeze, leave the mulch on as long as possible. Removing the mulch in March may encourage the plants to bloom before the danger of frost is past. A temperature of 32°F or lower may severely damage or destroy open flowers. Since the first flowers produce the largest berries, a late spring frost or freeze can drastically reduce yields.

To determine when to remove the mulch, periodically examine the strawberry plants in spring. Remove the mulch from the strawberry plants when approximately 25 percent of the plants are producing new growth. New growth will be white or yellow in color. (If possible, the winter mulch should remain on strawberries until mid-April in central Iowa. The average date of the last 32°F temperature in spring occurs in late April in central Iowa.) When removing the mulch, rake the material to the aisles between rows or an area next to the planting. If there is a threat of a frost or freeze later in the season during bloom, lightly rake the mulch over the strawberry plants.

**2015 Garden Calendar Available**

Gardens bring tasty food, delightful color, refreshing fragrance, rustling leaves, and enervating prickles and tickles. Sometimes they even tickle the fancy.

This year’s calendar captures the sense of playfulness found in many gardens. Take a whimsical journey through the seasons in photography, verse, and quippy garden quotes.

Makes a great gift and a handy garden journal too!

Calendars are available for $6.00 each - online at [www.store.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.store.extension.iastate.edu) or through the Mills County extension office.

**Upcoming Horticulture Events of Interest**

**Holiday Poinsettia Show**

**Date:** November 28, 2014 through January 4, 2015  
**Time:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily (closed Christmas Day and New Year's Day)  
**Location:** Lauritzen Gardens, Bancroft Street, Omaha  
**Cost:** Standard garden admission rates. Members are admitted free.

More than 5000 poinsettias in 26 different varieties were grown for the 2014 display. See varieties of multi-hued, deep red, sparkling white and speckled poinsettias that vary in hue, texture, height and bloom time.

**2015 Nebraska Great Plains Conference**

**Date:** January 20-21, 2015  
**Location:** Ramada Plaza, Omaha  
Nebraska Nursery and Landscape Association in partnership with Nebraska Arborists. [nnla.org](http://nnla.org)

**Ask the ISU Extension Gardening Expert**

**How do I care for my Christmas cactus in fall?**

Day-length and temperature control the flowering of the Christmas cactus. The Christmas cactus is a short-day plant. Plants will not bloom properly if exposed to artificial light at night. Flowers may also fail to develop if the plant is exposed to temperatures above 70 degrees Fahrenheit. Night temperatures of 60 to 65°F with slightly warmer daytime temperatures are ideal for flower formation. In early fall, place the Christmas cactus in a cool location that receives bright light during the day, but no artificial light at night. An unused bedroom or basement may have the proper environmental conditions. Keep the Christmas cactus a bit on the dry side in fall. A thorough watering every 7 to 10 days is usually sufficient. Continue to give the Christmas cactus good, consistent care during flower bud development. Moving the plant from one location to another, excessive watering or other changes to its care during flower bud development may cause the buds to drop off. The Christmas cactus can be moved and displayed in another room when the first flowers begin to open.
When should I cut back my asparagus?

The asparagus foliage can be cut back to the ground after it has been destroyed by a hard freeze in fall. However, it is generally recommended that the dead foliage be allowed to stand over winter. The dead debris will catch and hold snow. Snow cover helps protect the asparagus crowns from extreme cold. Asparagus foliage allowed to remain in the garden over winter should be removed in late March or early April before the spears begin to emerge.

When can I cut back my rhubarb plants?

Don’t cut back the rhubarb until the foliage and stalks have been destroyed by a hard freeze. To produce a good crop next spring, the rhubarb plants must manufacture and store adequate levels of food in their roots. The foliage continues to manufacture food as long as it’s healthy. Once destroyed, the foliage and stalks can be removed.

NOVEMBER GARDENING TO DO LIST

- Water recently planted evergreens thoroughly before the ground freezes to prevent winter dessication.
- Continue to water newly established trees, shrubs, and perennials.
- Plant spring-flowering bulbs. You can continue to plant most bulbs up until the ground freezes. Ideally though, they will have a couple of weeks to settle in before the ground is frozen.
- Mulch strawberries with 3 – 5 inches of straw.
- Refer to the owner’s manual for winter storage care of power equipment.
- Carefully blow or rake tree and shrub leaves off your perennial gardens. Large leaves get wet, mat down, and provide poor insulation for your plants. Shred fallen leaves and use them as a soil mulch or amendment for new plantings.
- Plant a windowsill herb garden to enjoy the fresh flavors all winter long.
- Soil preparation can be done until the ground freezes. Spread a 2-3 inch layer of organic matter on the soil of your perennial beds. Work it in to the top few inches.
- Leave stems, flower heads, and seedpods standing for winter interest.
- Prevent frost cracking or sunscald by wrapping young, thin-barked trees (such as maples and many fruit trees) with commercial tree wrap.
- Clean, sharpen, and store your garden tools so they will be ready and in good working order next spring.
- Cover perennials susceptible to winter damage, such as chrysanthemums, with pine needles, straw, or pine boughs.
- Pick up a copy of the 2015 Garden Calendar at your Extension office. Pick up an extra copy or two for easy gift-giving!
- Enjoy your garden bounty with family and friends. Happy Thanksgiving!

Resources for Horticulture information

ISU’s Hortline at (515) 294-3108
(Monday-Friday, 10 a.m.-noon, 1-4:30 p.m)

ISU/Mills County Extension: 712-624-8616
www.extension.iastate.edu/mills/yardgarden.htm

Iowa State University Publications

- PM 2079 Flowering Plants for the Late Summer Garden
- RG 316 Poinsettia Care
- RG 308 Growing Holiday Cacti
- RG 328 Growing Amaryllis
- PM 683 Composting Yard Waste
- PM 713 Indoor Plants
- RG 402 Lighting and Houseplants
- PM 731 Harvesting and Storing Vegetables
- RG 312 Suggested Daffodil Cultivars for Iowa
- RG 320 Growing and Over-wintering Garden Geraniums
- RG 304 Late Season Perennial Flowers

Horticulture Publications on-line
https://www.extension.iastate.edu/store/ListCategories

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