



PHOTO BY William M. Johnson

Amaryllis is a popular bulb that will be providing striking displays of color in many local landscapes over the month of April. Few flowering bulbs can surpass the state-ly beauty of the amaryllis.

Amaryllis is a popular bulb that is providing a stellar performance in many local landscapes over the month of April. Few flowering bulbs can surpass the stately beauty of the amaryllis.

Amaryllis readily adapts to our Gulf Coast landscapes and once established can become a long-lasting part of the landscape with minimal care.

Most plants in local landscapes are probably hybridized forms of amaryllis. This flowering bulb was first discovered by Eduard Poeppig, a young physician from Germany, while on a plant hunting expedition in Chile.

Although we frequently see

these beautiful plants for sale in pots around Christmas time, they can be raised very successfully out of doors in our mild climate.

Amaryllis grows from a large, multi-layered bulb that is very similar in appearance to the onion. Amaryllis produces large, trumpet-shaped flowers, growing as large as eight inches across in clusters of two-to-six flowers per stem. The leafless, hollow stems can grow to be two to three feet tall.

Although the dominant flower color of amaryllis growing in local landscapes is red, a range of other flower colors

occurs including shades of orange, pink as well as white. Remove dead blooms before seeds are produced. If not, flowering the following season will likely be reduced. Removing dead blooms also helps to maintain the aesthetic value of the planting. Amaryllis thrive in any reasonably good garden soil including our gumbo clays as long as drainage is good. Some garden articles recommend that amaryllis bulbs be planted in an area that receives part sun (about six hours of direct sun and then shade in the afternoon), but you are likely to see amaryllis



April 08, 2015



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News column printed in the Galveston Daily News, The Post, and other Galveston County Newspapers.



thriving in full sun to part shade in our area.

Once planted and established, amaryllis can be left alone for years. A light sprinkling of a general-purpose fertilizer in March and June and watering during unusually dry weather are all they need.

Beds should be mulched with 2-to-3 inches of shredded pine bark or other similar organic mulch to help reduce weeds and conserve moisture.

Amaryllis may be dug and reset every September or October. While it is not necessary to dig, separate, and replant each year, but doing so will encourage uniform flowering and larger blooms. Digging also provides an opportunity to discard unhealthy bulbs, to increase your plants by removing and replanting young offsets (bulblets) and to amend the bed with organic matter.

The bulbs may also be left in the ground for several years (typically for 2-to-4 years of growth) then divided in the fall season. This is one tough plant and I have divided my amaryllis in late winter (February) and plants still produced a respectable mass of flowers in late spring.

Whether you've never had an amaryllis before, or you have been growing them for years, amaryllis is a good investment for providing striking and dependable flower color in April landscapes.

Gardeners' Q&A

Question: I have a grapefruit tree that I planted in February 2014. It is now producing an abundance of flowers. I was told by a friend to remove any flowers or fruits produced during the second year of growth.

Answer: Technically, the advice you received was sound. You will indeed increase future growth and fruit production by removing any flowers or fruits that the tree produces during its second year of growth. And a commercial grower with many acres of year-old citrus trees would be well-advised to thin out or eliminate flowers and small

fruits during the second year of growth.

But let's face it. We usually buy plants to enjoy. And with citrus much of the enjoyment comes from harvesting fruit from our own trees. I recommend removing nearly all fruits that set after flowering.

It would be satisfactory to leave two or three fruits on a tree to enjoy later in the year when grapefruits start to ripen on the tree. You would be able to experience an early sampling of what future harvests will be like.

This will also provide an incentive to the gardener to continue to provide good care to the grapefruit tree over the upcoming growing season.

