

*Texas A&M AgriLife Extension Service — Galveston County Office*



PHOTO CREDIT: William M. Johnson



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**Amaryllis is a popular bulb that is providing a stellar performance in many local landscapes despite freeze injury sustained by leaves from multiple cold snaps during winter. Few flowering bulbs can surpass the stately beauty of the amaryllis.**

Amaryllis is a popular bulb that has been providing stellar performances in many local landscapes over the past few weeks. Few flowering bulbs can surpass the stately beauty of the amaryllis.

Many amaryllis plants have become an integral part of

my home landscape because of their proven performance. They have survived the record-breaking temperatures and drought of 2011, the winter freezes of 2017 and the rainfall from Hurricane Harvey. 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 other colors include shades of orange, pink as well as white and striped ones.

Remove dead blooms before seeds are produced. If not, flowering the following season will be likely be reduced. Removing dead blooms also helps to maintain the aesthetic value of the planting.

Amaryllis thrives in a range of soil types 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 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 wa-

tering during unusually dry weather are all they need.

Beds should be mulched with an inch or two of shredded pine bark or other similar organic mulch to help reduce weeds and conserve moisture.

The bulbs may 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.

Amaryllis may be dug and reset in September or October. While it is not necessary to dig, separate, and replant each year, 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.

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

**Q: There was an abundance of leaves falling from the live oak at my new home. What gives? I thought live oaks were evergreen.**

Answer: Although live oaks (*Quercus virginiana*) are considered evergreen because they hold onto their

leaves through the winter, many live oaks drop most or all of their foliage in early spring. They send out their new leaves so quickly that they are only leafless for a brief time. It can be confusing because not all live oaks are on the same cycle. Some live oaks drop a lot of leaves and some drop very few in a given year. If your live oak dropped its leaves during early spring, it is normal and no cause for concern. Don't rake up and throw away the oak leaves. The leaves make a great mulch or addition to your compost pile.

**Q: I have a live oak tree in my backyard that has several holes in the bark. The tree looks healthy, except for these holes. Is there anything I should do to treat this problem?**

Answer: The damage is caused by a bird called the yellow-bellied sapsucker. Sapsuckers peck shallow holes in the bark in a pattern of regular rows which causes the sap to bleed out. After pecking the holes, the sapsuckers fly away, and then come back to feed on the sugary sap that bleeds out and any insects that might have been attracted to it. Generally, the damage is minor and the trees are not badly affected. This becomes less of a problem in oaks as they age and develop a thicker bark. Sapsuckers are active from late winter through spring when the sap flows as the trees are getting ready to leaf out.

