



Trowel Talk!

December 2018

Blooming success



Amaryllis—Minerva
Photo: Susan Bicket

In Greek mythology, a beautiful young shepherdess, Amaryllis, fell madly in love with a handsome young shepherd. Again and again Amaryllis tried to gain his attention. Finally, in desperation she wounded herself to demonstrate her intense love. Where drops of blood fell a beautiful flower sprang forth. The shepherd was delighted, named the flower Amaryllis, and accepted the loving shepherdess as his bride.



Waterless Amaryllis
Photo: Josie Pazdzior

Today the Amaryllis is a highly popular houseplant and a frequent choice as a Christmas gift, as bulb or plant. After enjoying the blooms during this holiday season, you will probably want to know how to get it to rebloom next year.

The secret to persuading Amaryllis to rebloom is in rejuvenating the bulb after flowering, so that the bulb has enough energy to produce next year's flower embryo. When first planted, the bulb is large - depending on how much you paid for it - and plump. After flowering the bulb shrinks as much as 50%. That is how much energy is needed to produce the many blooms. You can help the bulb

replace all of that energy with some TLC.

It is not difficult. Begin by removing the blooms as soon as they lose vigour. Leaves will start to grow. Place the pot in bright light, not direct sun, and fertilize it every two weeks with fertilizer intended for flowering plants (follow the instructions on the container). Water it often and generously. When summer comes, place the plant outside in filtered light. Protection from squirrels may be necessary. Early in August stop fertilizing and in one to two weeks also stop watering. When the leaves begin to wither and turn yellow - late August to early September, this is a sign the plant is enter-

ing its rest period. Bring the plant in, remove all yellowed leaves, allow the soil to dry out and store in a cool dark place with the pot on its side. Check every few weeks and when you see a green tip emerging from the bulb - usually within six weeks - it is time to repot.

Shake off the old soil, remove dried up dead-looking roots - live roots are white and plump - and soak the basal plate, where the roots come out, for two hours. You can then repot in the same pot or a pot one size bigger. There should be about 2.4 cm. between the bulb and the side of the pot. This determines the pot size to use. Place old nylons over the hole in the bottom of the pot, add potting soil and position the bulb so that about half of it is above the soil. Water and place your plant in a cool bright place away from direct sunlight.

Favourites at Christmas time are the large red 'Merry Christmas' and white 'White Christmas'. However there are many other varieties that are gaining in popularity. You may want to experiment with some of these - 'Royal Velvet' - deep velvety red, 'Clown' bicolor - pink and white, 'Apple Blossom' - white with pink blush, 'Flower Record' - rose and white, 'Naughty Girl' - red and white, and the largest of all, 'Orange Sovereign' - large and orange. Some very fancy varieties include 'Picotee' - white with red rim, 'Lemon and Lime', 'Lady Jane' - pink double, and 'Red Peacock' - a double red.

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- newsletter@mgottawa.ca

Fran Dennett
Master Gardener

Note:

In recent years waterless Amaryllis, which are not planted in soil, have appeared in the market. The bulb is coated in wax which prevents evaporation, but also keeps it from taking up water and growing roots. A wire base is attached to the bottom of the bulb, and roots cut short. They are intended to be thrown away after flowering. However, the flower is not likely to be long-lasting. Removing the wax to try and get the bulb to take up water and grow roots for a second year is not really recommended. But this might be the perfect gift for some situations!.

December To Do

- Put out food and water for the birds.
- Make a wish list for Christmas.
- Plan next year's garden, make notes on things to do in spring.
- Monitor houseplants for insects and disease.
- Check on stored tubers to make sure they aren't desiccating or going moldy.
- Ask an MG if you have any gardening or plant ID questions

Tip of the Month

Check indoor plants regularly for pests and diseases. It's much easier to control problems when they're small. A few common culprits and what to do:

Small bugs like fruit flies around plants, and plants yellowing or not growing well could be **fungus gnats**, whose larvae chew on roots. Adults are attracted to yellow sticky traps, and larvae like moist soil. Let plants dry to 1-2" deep between watering, to kill larvae, and decrease egg laying. In a bad case, you may want to repot the plant, hosing off roots and disposing of the old soil.

Leaves with stippling, webbing, or curling and falling off can be **spider mites**, which are hard to see. They like hot, dry conditions. Isolate infested plants, remove and dispose of infested leaves, and give the plant a good spraying with water if possible, then treat with insecticidal soap. Repeat treatments will likely be necessary.

Master Gardeners of Ottawa-Carleton



Where to find us for free gardening advice!

ONGOING:

Telephone Help Line: 613-236-0034—Wednesday and Thursday 1–3 pm (all year)

E-mail Help Line: mgoc_helpline@yahoo.ca - monitored daily

Send photos of garden pests, diseases or plants for ID.

CLINICS:

Closed for the season, resuming in 2019

SPEAKING EVENTS & WORKSHOPS:

Tuesday, February 11th -7:00 pm

Growing Colourful Spring Flowering Shrubs

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Old Fire Hall, 260 Sunnyside Ave
Old Ottawa South Garden Club, guest fee \$7

Tuesday, March 12th - 7:30 pm

Perennials: Dividing and Maintaining

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
Carp Memorial Hall, 3739 Carp Rd.
West Carleton Garden Club, guest fee \$5

Monday, March 18th -7:30 pm

General Care of Perennials

Mary Shearman Reid, Master Gardener
St. Mary Magdalene Anglican Church, 537 Highway 105, Chelsea.
Gatineau Valley Gardeners

Friend of the Farm Lecture Series -7:00 pm –9:00 pm

Building 72 just east of the Prince of Wales roundabout. Free parking

Tuesday April 2nd - **Savvy Choices for Spring 2019**

Mary Shearman Reid and Stephanie Sleeth, Master Gardeners

Tuesday, April 16th -**The Art of Rock Gardening**

Josie Pazdzoir and Rob Stuart, Master Gardeners

Tuesday April 30th -**Trees and Shrubs - the Backbones of your Gardens**

Diane McClymont Peace, Master Gardener

Tuesday May 14th -**Kitchen Gardens**

Judith Cox , Master Gardener

\$12 members and \$15 non-members, per lecture



For more information on Master Gardeners, visit us at: <http://mgottawa.ca>

Cottony masses on plants, often with honeydew (sticky, shiny patches), means **mealybugs**. Prune out small infestations, or dab the masses with rubbing alcohol. Spraying the plant with insecticidal soap can help control the bugs.

Tiny white insects flying around are **whiteflies**, which suck plant juices, causing yellowing, weakening and stunting. Hose the plant off well, and apply insecticidal soap. Use yellow sticky traps to help control adults.

Whitish coating on leaves (if not normal

for the plant) suggests **powdery mildew**. Remove severely infected leaves, and make sure plant has good air circulation. Baking soda spray (1 tbsp/gal water + a bit of veg oil and dish soap) can help act as a preventative in susceptible plants.

Rots show as plant stems or roots turning brown/black and soft, with the plant above wilting. Avoid overwatering, and remove infected parts. If only a few roots are rotting you can cut those out and repot the plant in sterile potting soil and a clean pot.

*Amanda Carrigan
Master Gardener*