

Activity: Planting Goal: Psychological/Emotional Populations: All

TH Activity Plan – Amaryllis Bulb Planting

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Photo by L. Fleming, Thursd & Laidback Gardener



ACTIVITY DESCRIPTION: Participants will plant amaryllis bulbs to take home and observe the plant's growth and bloom.

THERAPEUTIC GOALS:

Cognitive/Intellectual: Discover variety of blooms within genus & why they vary; use plant development as metaphors for human growth & development

Physical: Practice attending to task at hand

Psychological/Emotional: Discuss plant & life's unpredictability, moments of awe & resiliency

Sensory: Recognize varying responses to flower colors & sizes

Social: Discuss varying responses & preferences to plants within group

STEP-BY-STEP PROCESS:

1. **Pre-Session Preparation:** Facilitator places bulbs (roots only) in lukewarm water in preparation for planting.
2. Facilitator begins session by showing off amaryllis flower (*Hippeastrum*) & sharing some facts & symbolism of this plant.
3. Participants handle bulbs observing their size, shape, color, smell, and denseness. Materials are passed out to each participant: containers & bulbs. Potting & watering stations are set up. Alternatively, amaryllis kits are distributed if this option is selected. Wetting coir pellets (potting medium) takes 20 minutes to expand ready for use, these typically included in kits.
4. Facilitator verbally & visually demonstrates ideal depth of planting bulb with one third of top not in soil. Discussion of watering & care of plant covers phases through crack, bloom & after bloom care.
5. Facilitator leads discussion on relevant topics (themes listed below) relating the bulb/plant to human growth, traits & behaviors.
6. Participants take plants with them to observe & enjoy the growth & bloom periods.

Materials

Amaryllis bulbs

Containers, potting mix,
spoons, water

Gloves, wipes

APPLICATIONS FOR POPULATIONS: This therapeutic horticulture activity's awe-inspiring moments occur after the session has concluded when the bulb begins its miraculous growth spurt. The facilitator should prepare/encourage participants to observe the plant often to see the rapidity of growth.

Amaryllis bulb planting is an easy activity that lends itself to many themes and metaphors that can be relevant to a variety of populations. These include observing plant development with spurts of growth (like teenagers), different types of plants including bulbs (people also come in many shapes and colors), versatility of plants that can grow in several environments – both water or soil, regrowth/re-blooming abilities (humans can transform themselves), unique and beautiful blooms (spidery flowers of 'Chico' amaryllis for example) and a plant that is self-contained and full of energy (in its bulb) (similar to human traits).

Amaryllis flowers have a long history with a variety of meanings. The Greek's attributed beautiful blooms to love and success. Victorian England prized the straight and sturdy stem as a sign of strength. More recently the Huntington's Disease Society of American adopted this flower as its symbol of strength, determination, and hope (LB, 2022). Pink amaryllis symbolize friendship, purple blooms signify the recipient is worth all the money in the world, and newer to market are spring pastel colors – not the bloom but the amaryllis bulbs dipped in colored wax. Fun facts: amaryllis blooms can be huge - 'Giant Amadeus' 9 inches in diameter; one specimen lived for 75 years; propagation can be done from seed though typically not true to the mother and 6 years to bloom; and Dutch law requiring at least one bud in bulb prior to sale ensuring a bloom (Hodgson, 2021).

SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS: All parts of amaryllis are poisonous because of their alkaloids, considered dangerous if eaten in large quantities. Gloves recommended if potting mix will be handled.

NOTES OR OTHER CONSIDERATIONS: Purchase bulbs in bulk from a nursery or bulb supplier (Van Engelen, Dutch Grown, Jackson & Perkins, Longfield Gardens). Consider what variety of amaryllis works for your program – smaller bulbs are less expensive and can sit on smaller (bedside) tables, multi-colored flowers offer a wow factor, kits have all supplies included, or bulbs dipped in red wax and ready to grow without additional soil or dish (newer to the market). Suppliers offer surprise packages (10 bulbs) which can provide horticultural interest and intrigue for a group as they observe the growth, blooms, colors and sizes of the unknown/un-named and unexpected variety of large flowering, double flowering, or exotic striped flowers, this relatable to life's unpredictability.

Planting tips: ideal time to plant amaryllis bulbs is October through April. Most flower late December until end of June; flowering period is usually 7-10 weeks. Larger bulbs produce more flowers. Store un-planted bulbs in a cool place (40-50 degrees F). Soak base and roots of bulb in lukewarm water for a few hours prior to planting. Note that not all amaryllis bulbs will rebloom.

Additionally, use nutritious potting compost or mix. Kits come with a coir pellet potting medium that expands when water is added. Bulbs should be planted up to its neck in mixture with the roots at the bottom of container. Water sparingly once potted, more when bud and leaves appear. Place indoors or outside with temperatures around 70 degrees. After flowering, cut off old blooms, then cut stem once it begins to droop. Over the summer water and fertilize - leaves will develop and grow. In early fall cut leaves back to 2 inches from top of bulb and remove from soil. Store the clean bulb with soil removed in a cool (40-50 degree) dark place for minimum of 6 weeks. Plant bulbs 8 weeks before desired bloom time. Amaryllis bulbs can be forced to bloom in water (no soil).

REFERENCES/ RESOURCES:

- Hodgson, L. (2021). [20 fun facts about the amaryllis](#). *Laidback Gardener*.
Johnson, K. (2021). [How to take care of amaryllis and get them to rebloom](#). *University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign College of Agriculture, Consumer & Environmental Sciences Illinois Extension*.
Let'em Bloom (LB). (2022). [The symbolism and meaning of Amaryllis flowers](#).



Edits were made for THAD purposes in 2023.

TH Activity Plan form developed by Lesley Fleming, Susan Morgan and Kathy Brechner (2012), revised in 2023