

Episode 140 show notes and advice

Episode description

This week, Sarah is joined by returning guest, Head Gardener, Josie Lewis, to discuss amaryllis and why everyone should fall in love with this spectacular and unusual plant. Learn all about forcing amaryllis bulbs, specialist advice for getting more from your plants, and the sensational alternatives for adding early spring cheer to your garden.

In this episode, discover:

- How to get the best results from amaryllis bulbs
- Josie's top spring alternatives

episode 140 advice sheet

Great for forcing in darker parts of the year, these unique plants remind Josie of flamingos, standing on one leg with a lot of fluff up top.

Sarah also explains that the doubles bloom for up to twenty days at a time, and the standard singles last between twelve and fifteen days.

Top tips for amaryllis displays (8:26)

If you're cutting amaryllis to use in arrangements, insert a thin bamboo cane or stick from the garden to ensure the stems stay upright. Simply place the stick up the hollow and secure with an elastic band at the end of the stem to stop it splitting and curling up like the tail of a pig.

Top varieties (5:40)

- Amaryllis 'Nymph' – this variety has salmon blush watercolour markings with bright green centres. These look excellent staked with a nest of woven silver birch branches in a pot or as a table centrepiece with fairy lights, dried leaves, and moss at the base. Incredibly prolific, each stem of amaryllis had three flower heads at the top at any one time, and each flower lasted up to 10 days before another spear emerges.
- Hippeastrum papilio (butterfly amaryllis) – a variety Josie has come to like, with shorter stems, and an abundance of flowers.

General tips for potting amaryllis (8:55)

- When it comes to strong and healthy plants, often the bigger the bulb, the better the plant becomes.
- Bring the bulbs inside, rehydrate the roots overnight, and pot up in terracotta for sturdy ballast, as the plant can be quite top heavy. Make sure you can fit two or three fingers between the edge of the pot and the bulb to give it room to grow, particularly if you're planting three bulbs in the same pot.
- Use free draining peat-free compost to pot up. The bulb should be poking out the top of the compost (a third or so showing). This will prevent the bulbs from rotting, which they are often prone to do in waterlogged soil.
- Be careful not to overwater the bulbs, keeping this step to a minimum until leaves appear. Once the leaf is visible, you can then begin to water the plant like you would any other house plant.

Getting the best from your amaryllis bulbs

- Sarah shares that bringing an amaryllis into flower on a shelf over a radiator, without a draft, is a truly effective way to bring them along. But once they are in flower move them into the centre of the room and maintain a constant temperature for the best results.

Life after flowering (12:42)

- When you're sure that no more spikes will surface, you can begin deadheading the amaryllis. Leave the stalks as they will photosynthesise on their own. When the stems go yellow, you can then cut them down.
- A dormant season in late August/early September in the dark will kickstart the process again.

Josie's top alternatives to amaryllis for early spring cheer (16:09)

- Hellebores – planted up in small terracotta pots, these are an absolute must-have. Bring them indoors if you have a party or want to decorate for an occasion, but they are predominately outdoor plants. Helleborus x sahinii 'Winterbells,' originally bred as a houseplant in Holland, this plant boasts beautiful clutches of green bells. If you have a porch, or somewhere sheltered, hellebores will keep going on and on.

- Viola cornuta – a more delicate form of pansies which are great for providing colour and vigour.
- Polyanthus – a Vita Sackville-West favourite which can be forced early.
- Lily of the valley – can be forced if you have a very well-established clump. Divide these into two or three terracotta pots for maximum impact.