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A Touch of the Exotic: Hardy Amaryllis

by Lydia Holley

Want to grow something that makes a big statement? Something that will make non-gardeners think you're growing something exotic and hard to grow? Then try the hardy amaryllis, *Hippeastrum x johnsonii*, also known as St. Joseph's lily, or Johnson's amaryllis.

This hardy amaryllis is thrilling to see when its stalks that have been dormant all winter begin to snake up in early spring, growing to around 2 ft tall. But its hollow stalks are only the beginning. The real thrill is when it opens its six-sided star-shaped blooms. It supplies such a bright shock of color, one can not help but be drawn to it.



Don't let its exotic looks fool you, though. This showy flower is actually quite easy to grow from a bulb. It is beautiful as a specimen, but even more striking grown in a large grouping. Hardy means it is able to withstand our freezes, so do not be shy in adding this beauty to your garden. Or enjoy the blooms of the hardy amaryllis in a container on your balcony, patio or porch.

Thought to be the first amaryllis hybrid, it is named after its breeder, Arthur Johnson, from England. It dates back to the late 1700's or early 1800's. Reports are that Mr. Johnson accidentally crossed two types of amaryllis which produced this now-famous and much-loved flower.

You will be delighted to know that the hardy amaryllis easily multiplies. This makes it a nice plant to share with other gardeners, and is known as a pass-along plant. You may divide it in autumn, or after blooming in spring.

Plant hardy amaryllis in full sun to part shade, and as with most bulbs, make certain the soil drains wells in the winter. Hardy amaryllis are deer resistant, and fragrant. You can even bring their blooms indoors. Its cut blooms can last up to a week in a vase.

Considered an heirloom plant, hardy amaryllis can be difficult to find in nurseries. Your best bet is finding it from a gardening friend or at the HCMGA plant sale next year.

For more information, call 903-675-6130, email hendersonCMGA@gmail.com or visit www.henderson-co-tx-mg.org.