

Amaryllis belladonna - Hippeastrum

Floatation Method

Fill a very clean, clear plastic container, for which a transparent lid is available, half full with water. Well cleaned Chinese Take-away containers are perfect and tap water seems to work best. To successfully strike the seed, the minimum temperature should not drop below freezing. The seedlings need to be strong enough to survive their first Winter with you.

Place the sheathed seeds onto the surface of the water one at a time. The seeds will naturally float towards each other. It is acceptable for them to remain touching, however each seed should be floating directly on the water, and not resting on top of other seeds. Place the lid on the container, but do not seal it. The lid will help to maintain a level of humidity, but if condensation occurs on the inside of the container, the lid should be opened further or rotated so as to reduce the humidity. If any of the seed sheaths have mould growing on them, remove them immediately - if this does happen, this indicates that the container is in a position that is too hot.

The seed needs to be kept at a reasonable temperature as too much heat will kill them, but too little and the germination time is too long and the seeds will simply swell up and drown. Also, mould could be a sign that your container is not completely clean. If more than two seeds show signs of mould then you must start again with clean containers.

The seeds need light to germinate but cannot handle direct sunlight. A windowsill that does not receive direct sun but is 'sunlit' is perfect.

After about two weeks, small white roots will be observed growing down from the bottom of the sheaths. In another week or so, small grass like leaves will be observed pushing themselves out of the sheaths.

Once the leaves are about 4-5cm long, the seedlings can be carefully removed from the water and placed, individually, into small pots containing a good quality seed raise mix. Wet the soil well before transplanting and use a pencil to make holes into which individual roots will be placed. Gently pick up each seed by its leaf and settle its root into the soil. The remains of the seed sheath should be resting on the surface of the soil. Back fill the hole. After all the seedlings are placed, water them gently but thoroughly to encourage the soil to adhere to the roots.

They cannot handle direct sunlight, so ideally raise them in a shade-house or back on the windowsill you started with but the soil must be kept moist.

When the second leaves appear on the seedlings you can start to introduce them to a little more light and can water them with a very weak solution of Seasol or another plant conditioner to help encourage root growth.

Once they have settled into the pot and leaf growth is stable provide a mild, or slow release fertilizer and leave them in pots for another six months before moving them out into full sun.

When they are about twelve months old or at a size you are happy with you can plant them into the garden or into larger pots. Please remember that they are still very vulnerable at this stage, so if you plant them into the garden in their second Spring, extra care will need to be given to protect the young bulbs from pest attacks, such as snails and slugs or even grasshoppers. The roots are very important to the plant, so take care when transplanting. It is best to prepare a bed first by digging in some organic material such as horse or cow manure or well rotted compost. Let this sit for about one week and keep moist.

Gently remove the seedlings from the pot and place into a hole. Back fill gently, ensuring that the small neck is above the soil line, water in well, then keep just moist until they begin to grow. Plant each bulb approximately 20-25cm apart and do not over water, as they will rot if left to sit in boggy wet soil.

In three years the bulbs will have matured sufficiently to begin blooming. They prefer to be able to form a large clump, so you should not need to split them up for 5-6 years.

Soil Germination

Select a good quality seed raise mix and add vermiculite. Mix 2 parts vermiculite to 1 part seed raising mix and place in a propagation tray. Lay the seed on top, being careful not to overlap the seeds. Sprinkle the mix back over the seeds, just to cover them, not too thick, then water well.

Place the tray into a plastic bag and seal it. Keep in a warm position that is well lit but not full sun. You will need to keep an eye on the moisture level. If they are starting to dry you will need to spray them again.

Check the tray daily to watch for mould growth or disfigurement of seedlings, if you see either of these they must be discarded immediately.

After 6 - 8 weeks if the seedling leaf length is 4 - 5 cm you can then open the bag and transplant the seedlings to individual pots. Again, a good quality seed raising mix must be used. Seedlings must be protected from full sun but need light to continue to grow.

Follow planting instructions from Flotation method.