

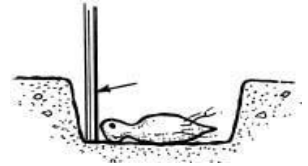
Tips for Growing Dahlias

When to Plant - Very Late April to Mid-May is the best time to plant in our climate. The soil cannot be cold...it must be warming up. Tubers can rot in cold, wet soil! Dahlias take about 90 days after planting to bloom.

Where to Plant - Plants need **at least 6 full hours of sun per day**. Do not plant dahlias under trees, too close to fences, in areas with root competition, or areas that are rocky. If you plant in the shade, they will not thrive & blooms will be sparse. Plant the taller varieties to the rear of the garden and the lower growing dahlias in front or between other plants.

Soil Preparation - Dahlias like average, well-drained soil. (PH of 6.5 – 7 is best) You can add some organic matter, but do not over do it (50% average soil/50% organic matter). Aged manure or commercial compost works well and should be added in early spring. Leaf compost is good too. Sandy soil is perfectly fine, but heavy clay soil must be lightened up with sand or peat moss. A neutral soil is preferable to a highly acid one.

Planting – Dahlias that grow 3' or taller should be spaced about 2-3 feet apart. Shorter dahlias should be spaced about 18" apart. The taller varieties will need to be staked and this needs to be done at planting time ...(you don't want to accidentally pierce the planted tubers!) To Plant: Dig a hole 5" deep x 10" across. Put the stake in the hole now. Put bone meal or 5-10-10 granular fertilizer (2tsp) in the hole and cover it with some soil. Lay the tuber flat on its side, 4" -6" deep, with the eye of the tuber pointing up. Do not plant tubers vertically like you would a tulip or daffodil....dahlias need to be laid on their sides. After tuber is in the ground, don't completely fill in the hole with soil...just cover planted tuber with 1 – 2 inches of soil. The shallow soil layer will heat up faster once the sun shines and your plant should pop up faster. Slowly fill in the hole as your plant grows. Do not put bark mulch around your plants. The mulch doesn't allow the soil to warm up as quickly and it is also too acidic to be used around dahlias.



Watering – Do not water at planting time unless your soil is extremely dry. Normal springtime rain has made the soil moist enough for dahlia tuber needs. In our dryer climate, you can start watering lightly about a week after planting. Water lightly for a few weeks until the weather starts warming up more. As it gets hot you need to water deeply several times a week or even daily with your sprinkler system. Drip irrigation works well too.

Fertilizing –When plants get 4 -5" high, use *Miracle-Gro* liquid fertilizer at half strength. Do this foliar feeding every week or two. When plants reach 18" tall and when the buds start forming, start a monthly feeding program using 5-10-10 granular fertilizer (about 1-2 T. per plant along the drip line of the plant) **DO NOT OVER FERTILIZE** and only use low nitrogen fertilizers. Over fertilizing promotes smaller blooms and tubers that will rot or shrivel in storage. Correct watering and good soil to start with will make the best blooms.

Weed Control – Hand weeding is the only type of weed control you should use. **NO HERBICIDES!** Dahlias have many surface roots so cultivate lightly.

Topping or Pinching – On taller varieties (over 3 feet) you MUST top or pinch the plant. To have a compact bushy plant with more flowers, pinch out the central growing tip right above the 3rd full set of leaves when the plant is about 12 -15” high. If you don’t do this your plant will grow tall and lanky and produce very few flowers. Not a Pretty Sight!

Pest Control - In our area the biggest problem to growing beautiful Dahlias (especially when the tiny plants first come up) is the not-so-well-liked EARWIG!!!. Watch closely and use SLUGGO-PLUS or Lilly Miller Earwig & Sowbug Bait before the little green leaves show up. If you have slug problems in your garden, treat early and often with SLUGGO or similar slug bait. Aphids are pretty rare on dahlias, but you can try insecticidal soap or a sharp blast of water from the hose to get rid of them.



Diseases - Thankfully, dahlias aren’t prone to as many diseases as roses. POWDERY MILDEW is the one to start preventative spraying for in August. Then keep at it every other week. If powdery mildew becomes too severe on the plants it can affect the tubers and the way they store in wintertime.

Cut Flowers –To ensure continuous blooming from July till frost, remove all dead blossoms. Cut and enjoy their blooms. The more you cut them, the more they will bloom. Cut flowers in the morning or at dusk. For longer lasting blooms, plunge the newly cut stems (up to about 2-3” on the stem) into 160 degree water. Allow the water to come to room temperature, drain and add new water. Change water daily and re-cut stems daily. Flowers should last for nearly a week.

Digging and Storing- After first frost in the Fall (around Halloween) cut dahlias down, leaving only a short stalk.

Dahlia clumps can be left in the ground through the winter but you take the risk of them freezing, even if they are heavily mulched (10”-12”). In early March start removing the mulch so the soil can start warming up. Then you can dig, divide and replant the tubers.

If you choose to dig them up in the Fall, carefully dig around the stalk and gently lift the clump out of the ground. Sweep away any loose soil on the clump, trying to prevent broken necks on the tubers. Any broken tubers will have to be cut off. Wash dirt off entire clump. Trim off all the thread-like root hairs. Now is the time to mark tubers for identification later. “Ink in a Bottle” pencils (available at office supply stores) work great for writing on wet/damp tubers. Sharpie markers work well on dry tubers.

Dividing tuber clumps in fall is easiest. Use a sharp knife or sharp pruners to make your cuts. Each tuber must be attached to a piece of the main stalk where growth “eyes” will appear. After clumps are divided, store in cardboard or plastic boxes in cool but not freezing area. I store mine in low plastic boxes. The tubers are packed in slightly damp vermiculite (available at local nurseries). I sprinkle powdered fungicide between the layers of tubers. Temperature in your storage area should remain below 45 degrees F. Check your boxes several times during the winter and discard any tubers that show signs of rot.