



DAHLIAS

Dahlias are plants with tuberous roots native to the mountains of Mexico and Guatemala. Because of their unique genetic makeup, dahlias are very easy to hybridize. This has led to thousands of different dahlia varieties that have been cultivated through the years. Plant heights can range anywhere from 12" to over 6'. Blooms also vary greatly not only in size that can range from under 2" to 18" but also in color and shape with 20 forms recognized by the American Dahlia Society.

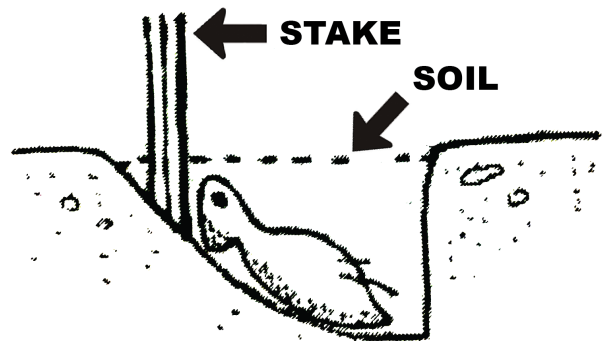
PLANTING

Dahlia tubers can be planted once the threat of frost has passed. This is usually mid to late May, once the soil temperature has risen to 60 degrees F.

Dahlias do best in a location with well drained soil that receives at least 6 hours of sunlight a day.

Morning sun and afternoon shade is ideal. Dahlias that grow over 3' tall will need staking to prevent wind and storm damage, so select an appropriate sized stake (5'-6') at the time of planting and tag it with your dahlia name. Then, dig a 4-6" deep and

wide hole next to the stake. Place the tuber in the hole at an angle with the eye of the tuber next to the stake. A general garden fertilizer, such as a 5-10-10 can be mixed into the soil at this time. Cover the tuber with 1-2" of soil, patting gently with your hands. In the spring the soil is naturally moist and dahlias are not watered until they sprout above ground. Once the plant reaches a height of 1', secure it loosely to the stake. Continue to tie about every two weeks to prevent damage.



Plants should be 18"-24" apart, and planted in rows about 2-3 feet apart. Growers without a lot of garden space may decide to grow dahlias in containers. Fill the container with a good mix of garden soil, plant the tuber and do not water until sprouts emerge above soil. The best types of dahlias for container gardening are the low-growing and/or dwarf varieties. You will need to fertilize more than you do in your row gardens. An all-purpose fertilizer for blooming plants works well for this.

GENERAL CARE

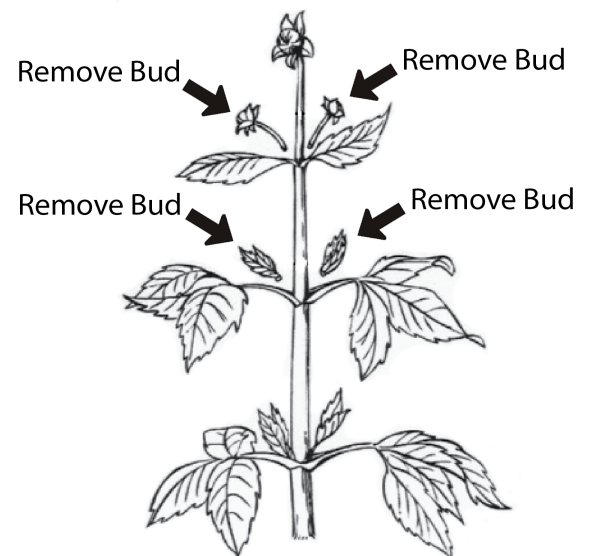
Watering is very important. To grow successful dahlias, they need at least one inch of moisture, either from rain or irrigation, each week throughout the growing season. More can be given at the height of the growing season. Dahlias should be watered in the early morning to allow the plants to dry out before evening so as not to encourage disease. A liquid fertilizer may be applied every two weeks. A mulch can be added in early July to conserve water and cool the soil.



Topping is the removal of the growing tip, which then produces bushier plants with more blooms. Once the plant has at least three sets of leaves it can be pinched off above the third set of leaves allowing 4-6 side branches to grow. In order to grow your dahlia to its maximum potential, you will need to disbud your dahlias.

Disbudding is done by removing the side buds and leaving only the center bud. The next set of buds can also be removed to promote larger, stronger blooms.

Dahlias can be bothered by certain insects and/or diseases. However, the damage may not be severe enough to warrant control methods. Oftentimes, a good rinsing with water is all it takes. Your local extension office is a good resource for managing pests and diseases.

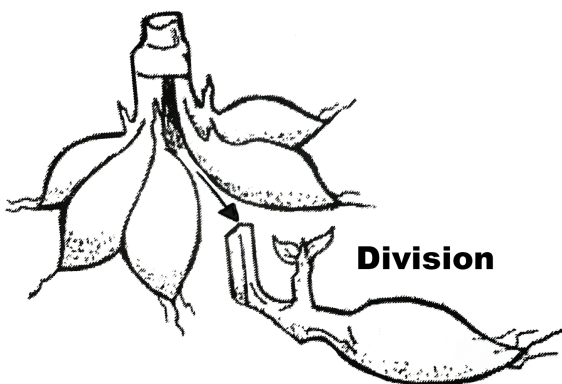


OVERWINTERING/STORING

Dahlias are very frost sensitive and should be dug about 7-14 days after a killing frost. The tuber clumps can be **divided** at

this time, or you can

wait until spring. To produce a new plant each tuber must have an eye that appears on the crown where the tuber meets the stalk. When dividing the tubers, make sure to include a portion of the crown as well as the eye. Both parts are needed to ensure a viable tuber. Tubers need to be stored at 40-50 degrees throughout the winter in a medium that keeps them from drying out, such as peat moss in an unsealed plastic bag. Or you may choose to skip the overwintering process altogether and simply purchase new tubers in the spring.



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