

Digging and Storing

After the first frost (around November 1) cut dahlias down, leaving only a short stalk. Carefully lift the tuber clump by digging at least a foot from the stalk, then slowly pull on this 'handle' while using the spade as a lever. Take care to shake or sweep away any loose soil to prevent broken necks; such tubers are not viable. Wash the dirt off the clump. Trim off thread-like root hairs and any damaged tubers. Don't forget to mark or label the tubers for easy identification.

It is best to divide tuber clumps in fall. Use a sharp, sturdy knife or pruners. Each tuber must be attached to a piece of the main stalk where growth 'eyes' appear. To prevent fungus disease, dust the tubers with sulphur, Captan, or soak them briefly in a bucket where one cup of bleach has been added to clean water.

The roots will keep best if the storage area is cool, but always kept from freezing. A garage or a crawl space works best - check that the temperatures remain below 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Fungus diseases appear if the storage conditions are too warm and if there is too much moisture present. Most growers store tubers in plastic bags, half-filled with slightly damp vermiculite to prevent shriveling. Line a box with plastic or newspaper and store the bags securely until March. Check the roots twice during the winter and discard any that show rot.

Dahlia tubers left in the ground will survive cold winter days if kept from freezing. This is accomplished by heaping mulch over the roots. However, the risk remains that a cool spring will cause them to rot. Good drainage is essential for tubers to be kept successful in this manner. If you do not plan on digging tubers, plan on having a working party - after two or three years the tuber clumps can be quite large. Successful division of such clumps presents a huge challenge.

QUESTIONS?

The Puget Sound Dahlia Association is composed of enthusiastic growers who are eager to assist you and provide more information about the growing and showing of dahlias. If you have any questions or want to know about the club's schedule, call our hotline at

425-836-4487

www.pugetsounddahlias.org

GROWING DAHLIAS

With the PUGET SOUND DAHLIA ASSOCIATION

Dahlias, with their limitless shapes and colors, add spice to any garden venture. Get off to a good start by planting the best varieties. Then follow this guide for a festival of blooms from July until the first frost.

Planning the Garden

Location: The ideal location for dahlias is one in full sun. However, the plants will tolerate some shade.

Drainage: The soil must be well-drained. A neutral soil is preferable to a highly acid one. Avoid planting close to shrubs or trees.

Planting: Dahlias can vary in height from one to seven feet. Check each variety for its rated height and plant where suitable - the taller ones to the rear of the garden and the lower growing dahlias in front or between other plants. Dwarf varieties are perfect for borders or containers. Space dahlias according to bloom size: the larger-flowering varieties should be planted 2-3 feet from others, while the smaller varieties can be planted 18 inches apart.

Soil: Most dahlias thrive in well-prepared and well-drained soil. Rich loam is their favorite. The addition of organic material (compost, leaf mold, or aged manure) will help many types of soil. Commercial compost also is an excellent soil amendment.

Fertilizers: About two weeks before planting, broadcast 5-10-10 granular fertilizer over the soil and spade it in. When the dahlia plants are 6 inches high apply a water-soluble fertilizer high in nitrogen, such as fish fertilizer. Later in the season, just when flowers begin to bloom, apply liquid fertilizer that is low in nitrogen, but has high levels of phosphorus and potash.

Planting Procedures

- The time to plant in this area is after the last frost, between April 15 and June 1. Don't try to rush the season. More tubers are lost in the aftermath of a cool and wet spring than many winters.
- Check your soil for proper moisture. It is better to plant when the soil is a bit dry than wet.
- Place stakes where the tubers are to be planted.
- Remove about five inches of soil. Place the tuber horizontal with the eye upward and near the stake. Cover the tuber with an inch of soil. The shallow soil layer will heat up faster once the sun shines.

Summer Care

- Watering:** Water every two weeks - more frequently if it's very hot and when buds begin to form. A thorough, deep soaking is better than frequent light waterings.
- Pinching:** To have a compact, bushy plant with more flowers, pinch out the center growing tip when the plant is one foot high. (see illustr.)
- Disbudding:** For bigger blooms, better stem, and better quality, pinch off the side buds at the end of each growing branch (see illustr.)
- Pest Control:** Dahlias are loved by slugs in spring, by spider mites in the heat of summer, and by aphids and earwigs just about any time. Use Deadline around young plants to ward off slugs; systemic insecticides and a number of organic controls (a sharp spray of water does wonders on aphids and mites) help keep your dahlias pretty and productive.
- Weeding:** Since dahlias have many surface roots, only light cultivation is recommended. A good weeding early in the season and a blanket of mulch will help eliminate a larger weed problem later.



Planting dahlias



Pinching (topping)



Disbudding



Dividing the clump

Cutting the Flowers

It is best to cut dahlias early in the morning. To properly condition the blooms, place them in water in a cool, dark place away from drafts for six hours or so. Display your dahlias in a cool part of your home. By changing the water every other day, your blooms should last up to a week

