

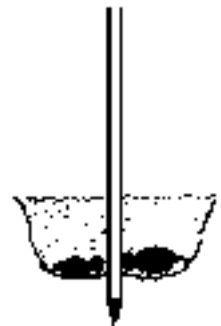
DAHLIAS - Care and Maintenance

www.nwCORE.org

- The ideal location for dahlias is 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.
- Height & Spacing: Dahlia plants vary in height from one to seven feet. Check each variety for its height, and plant where suitable -- the taller ones to the rear of the garden, the dwarf tubers as border decorations. Note: tuber size *does not* indicate size of plant! Space your dahlias according to bloom size -- the larger blooming ones should be planted 2-3' from other plants, while the smaller blooming varieties can be planted 1-2' apart.
- Soil Preparation: Most dahlias thrive in well-prepared, well-drained soil. A basic soil conditioner that will improve any garden is an application of compost and/or well composted manures. Sand can be added if soil is heavy. Thoroughly turn the soil before planting.
- Fertilizers: About two weeks before planting, broadcast 5-10-10 over the soil and spade it in. Alternatively can put a small quantity of slow-release fertilizer in bottom of hole as you plant tubers. In mid-July, a light top-dressing of steamed bone meal and muriate of potash will enhance the color of the blooms and help promote tuber growth. If not available, 5-10-10 can be used, but avoid using nitrogen fertilizers (for lawns) or you'll have more leaves than blooms.

Planting Your Dahlias

- The time to plant in the Pacific Northwest area is after the last frost, sometime between April 15 and June 1. Some say, when the lilacs are blooming is a good rule of thumb. If your tubers have eyes growing it is easier to orient them ("eyes" always UP)
- Check your soil for proper moisture; too soggy/cold and the tubers will rot.
- Place stakes/support where the tubers are to be planted.
- Dig a hole 5-6" deep. Position the stake in place. Lay the tuber flat with the eye upward, near the stake, but leave enough room for tubers to develop between the eye and the stake, so the eye should be about 6-8" away from the stake. Cover the tuber with soil. You can apply in several layers as the shoots grow. The tubers should be planted less deep in heavy soil.
- Place slug bait around the garden **as soon as possible**. Slugs LOVE dahlia shoots, if your dahlias don't seem to be "growing" and you haven't baited—they are probably being consumed to just below the ground every night!



Summer Care

Mulching around the plants will help hold the moisture in and reduce watering. However, you should not mulch until after the plants are tall enough that the slugs can't destroy, as the mulch provides shelter for the slugs.

Watering: Do not water until plants are 6-10" high. Water approx. every two weeks -- more frequently during very hot weather, and when buds begin to form. A thorough, deep watering is better than frequent light waterings. Also, watering from below reduces fungus on leaves. Trimming lower leaves from plant stems also improves airflow.

Topping: To have a compact, bushy plant with more flowers, pinch out the center growing point when the plant is about one foot high (see illustration above).

Disbudding: For better quality blooms with strong stems, pinch off the side buds at the end of each growing branch (see illustration to right).



Spraying for insects—**NOT recommended!**

With the concern of impacts to our environment, many growers are either using organic approaches or "live with the bugs". Be kind to the environment. Many bugs are really friends of the dahlia helping us control those that are not. A spray of water with a few drops of dishwashing liquid will usually control an aphid infestation with several applications. You can also just "spray off" the aphids or other problem pests with a nozzle spray of water directed at the bugs. Keeping organic litter picked up will help deter earwigs.

Weeding

Since dahlias have many surface roots, only light cultivation is recommended. Best weed and moisture control is to mulch around the base of the plant once it becomes large enough that slugs are not able to destroy in one night! After July, cultivate no deeper than two inches, and not closer than one and a half feet from the main trunk.

Cutting Blooms

Cut early in the morning or mid-evening. To properly condition the blooms, place them in very hot water immediately after cutting. Avoid placing bouquets in a draft. Display your flowers in a cool part of your home, avoiding direct sunlight. By misting regularly and changing the water every other day, your blooms will last several days. Some blooms will last over a week!

Digging And Storing Tubers

Around November 1, or after the first really hard frost (all foliage is blackened) dahlias stems are cut down to the ground and left for 8-10 days. Lift root clumps carefully with a spade by digging around the entire plant about one foot from the stalk. Letting tubers air dry (watch for freezing temps!) for a few days to let the skin of the tuber cure a bit before handling minimizes damage. Use care to prevent "broken necks". Stalks are trimmed at just above root level, roots are washed, you can use a spray nozzle on the hose, but don't make it too strong a stream or you will damage the tuber skin. Can be soaked in fungicide (Captan recommended) to help prevent fungus and mildew. Let air dry for a day. Trim out mother tuber and smaller hairy roots. Tuber clumps should be labeled and then divided or stored as a clump (see illustration). More detailed instructions can be found (and would be helpful as they have photographs) at <http://dahlias.net/dahwebpg/CultureIndex/Culture.htm>



The roots will keep best if the storage area is cool but *always* above freezing. Most growers store roots in a medium such as slightly damp vermiculite in order to prevent shriveling. Line a box with plastic and put in alternate layers of vermiculite (straw, sawdust or shredded newspaper can also be used—depending on where you store your dahlias, different mediums work better) and dahlia roots. Be certain to check the dahlia roots every 6 weeks. In our environment (Pacific NW) mold is a problem during storage. If found, rinse mold off, check to see that the tuber is still viable and that the mold is not because the tuber is rotting. If the tuber is rotting, you can try cutting the rot out (if not close to the neck, dust with fungicide and store separately until you are assured that it won't infect other stored tubers.

Dahlia roots left in the ground will survive if kept from hard freezing. This is usually can be accomplished by heaping straw or mulch over the roots and tented with cardboard. Additional leaves and/or straw will help insulate from cold, preventing the necks from rotting. *Good drainage* is essential for roots to be kept successfully in this manner. It does make it hard to "share" your dahlias. They can be dug and divided in the spring before growth begins. Clumps should be dug and divided every few years to maintain health.

Whatcom Dahlia Society* - <http://whatcomcountydahliasociety.org>

American Dahlia Society - <http://www.dahlia.org>

Dahlia Sales – Whatcom County Dahlia Society* – 1st Saturday in April at Bloedel Donovan Park, Bellingham

Tiffs Dahlias – South of Birch Bay Lynden Rd. at 7942 Kickerville Rd., east side 360-332-4787, email: tiffsdahlias@gmail.com

Robin Neal—local grower who also sells tubers—email: robinneal02@gmail.com or text 360-303-5773