

# Growing Dahlias

**Latin Name Pronunciation:** dah'lee-uh

Dahlias prefer full sun (though partial shade is acceptable), well-drained soil, and even moisture. They are perennial in Zones 8–10. In colder zones they are treated as annuals and need to be overwintered indoors.

**Dahlias tubers should be planted outside once the danger of frost has passed and soil temperature has reached approximately 60°F.**

## Dahlia Care

### Planting

- For a single tuber or a tuber clump: Dig a hole about 4-6" deep and wide enough to accommodate the tuber. Place the tuber in the hole with the cut stem end and/or "eyes" at the top. (If you're not certain which side is "up," lay the tuber on its side.) Back-fill the hole gently, covering the tuber completely with 2-3" inches of soil. To avoid causing rot, do not water the tuber immediately after planting, unless the soil is very dry.

### Light/Watering

- Dahlias are at their best when grown in full sun in the North, and afternoon shade in the South.
- Do not water until growth appears above the ground; once plants are established, a deep watering twice a week will get them through summer dry periods.

### Fertilizer/Soil and pH

- Soil temperature at planting should be 60°F.
- Dahlias prefer well-drained soil with a pH of 6.5 to 7.0.
- A fertilizer low in nitrogen is best (5-10-10, for example), first applied 30 days after planting and then monthly. Do not overfeed and avoid high-nitrogen products.

### Pruning

- Dahlias make excellent cut flowers; to achieve nice stems for cutting and bushier, compact plants, pinch out the center shoot just above the third set of leaves in late spring.
- To get the most out of your cut flowers, place them in very hot water (160°F) until it cools.

### Reflowering

- If dead flowers are diligently removed, flowering will continue until the first hard frost.

- To develop large, exhibition-size blooms, remove side buds and allow only one bud per stem to develop.

### **Harvesting/Dividing**

- Wait a few days after the foliage is blackened by frost before gently digging out the tubers to store for the winter
- Cut the stalk to 4–6" tall, rinse the soil off the tubers, and allow the clump to air dry under cover for 24 hours.
- After harvesting, Dahlia tubers can be stored as a clump or divided and stored individually.
- If stored as a clump, you may divide them in the spring before planting. The eyes will be more visible but the tuber will be harder to cut.
- Use a sharp knife to cut the tubers apart, and try to cut so that each tuber or clump you segregate has at least one eye (a dormant bud). Only tubers with an eye will grow stems.
- Not all tubers will have visible eyes, so cutting a clump into halves or quarters is safer than separating a clump into all individual tubers.
- Line cardboard boxes or terracotta pots with newspaper and nest the tubers inside, covering them with barely moist sawdust, sand, or peat.
- Keep boxes cool (40–50°F) and dry for the winter in a dark spot.

### **Calendar of Care**

#### **Early Spring**

- When your tubers arrive in early spring, you may start them indoors in pots or keep them indoors in a cool, dark, dry place (a spot in the basement or the bottom of a closet in a cool room work nicely) then plant them out when the ground warms to 60 degrees F.
- Water tubers sparingly once after planting and then do not water again until new growth appears.
- Fertilize with 5-10-10 when growth reaches 2" tall.

#### **Fall**

- Mulch plants heavily if overwintered in the ground in Zones 7 and above.
- Further north, wait until a few days after hard frost has killed the foliage, then dig tubers, and let them air dry under cover for 24 hours. Store them in newspaper-lined cardboard boxes or clay pots filled with lightly moistened sand, peat, or sawdust. Keep the boxes in a cool, dry and dark area of the basement or other interior space that is ideally around 40–50°F. Tubers may be divided before storing, if desired. If you have more than one variety, label each tuber.
- Remove and compost or discard all old foliage from the garden area.