

Dahlia Care - Instructions and tips after the May 1 tuber sale

Tubers can be planted outdoors at about the same time as warm weather tomato and eggplant vegetables. This is the third week in May to the first week in June in most northern states. If planting is delayed store the tubers in plastic bags in a cool, dry, dark location. The plastic bags must be kept open and not sealed. If available add a little Vermiculite, wood chips or sawdust to the bag. If at the time of planting outdoors the tuber has created a shoot more than 1" in length cut it back to 1" with a clean blade.

When you are planting the tubers directly outdoors loosen the soil 8" deep and 12" wide. However, do not plant the tuber more than 4"-6" below the ground surface and initially cover with only 1 to 2 inches of soil. Set the Tuber horizontally with the eye or shoot if present pointing up. Place a stake about 2 inches from the tuber sprout for supporting the stem and stalk as the plant grows. Outdoors tubers should not have to initially be watered as there is usually enough moisture in the soil. Begin to water when there are at least two sets of green leaves and add some of the soil that was not initially used to help support the growing stem.

Light/Watering

- Dahlias are at their best when grown in full sun in the Northern states.
- Do not water until growth appears above the ground; once plants are established with multiple sets of leaves, a deep watering twice a week will get them through summer dry periods. Once the plants are established and making leaves and buds, they will then need significant regular watering.
- **. Important: resist the temptation to over-water in the early stages of growth as the tubers will rot in soggy soil while they are trying to make new roots.**

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Fertilizer/Soil and pH

- Soil temperature at planting should be 60°F or higher. If in doubt use a soil thermometer.
- Dahlias prefer an open, well-drained soil with a pH of 6.5 to 7.0.
- If your garden soil has a lot of clay and does not drain well condition it with Peat moss and Vermiculite.
- A fertilizer low in nitrogen is best (5-10-10, for example), first applied 30 days after planting and then side-dress monthly. Do not overfeed, and avoid high-nitrogen, water-soluble products or you will get more leaves than blooms.

Pests/Diseases

- Aphids can be killed by spraying with insecticidal soap or Neem.
- When the young growing shoots come out of the ground, they should be protected from slugs by using some slug bait or Sluggo. Slugs have a nasty habit of eating the young growing Dahlia stem.
- If you have ground hogs or rabbits near your bed, they also enjoy eating Dahlia plants. Sometimes a fence and other preventative measures need to be taken.
- If Dahlia stems show breakage and wilting, borers may be present. To deter, keep weeds away from the planting, and cut off and destroy any larvae-infested stems or treat with BT organic caterpillar spray

- Watch for spider mites during hot, dry weather; spray leaves with Neem or a forceful jet of cold water, particularly on the undersides.
- If powdery mildew appears as a whitish coating on the leaves, spray with wettable sulfur or other appropriate fungicide. Next year, give plants more space for better air circulation.
- If stems rot at the soil line or plants suddenly wilt and die, a bacterial or fungal agent may be present. Remove and destroy any affected plant parts; avoid this problem by planting in well-drained, light soil and do not overwater. Keep mulch several inches away from the plant stems.

Dahlias vary in height from 2 to seven feet. Taller ones are usually in the background and shorter ones up front. Most dahlias should be spaced 18"-24" apart.

Never use herbicides near Dahlias. They should be weeded carefully by hand as the roots are shallow. Herbicides will quickly kill a Dahlia plant.

Good luck with you new plants! I think you will find these blooms are some of nature's most beautiful gifts.