



DAHLIAS

Dahlias are colorful spiky flowers which generally bloom from midsummer to first frost, when many other plants are past their best.

Handle tubers carefully as the buds which are at the stem end of the tuber are fragile. Leave the root in its bag until ready to plant. Open the bag slightly and place in a cool place. Tubers can be planted directly into the garden after all risk of frost has past and the soil is warm, if they are sprouted. Dormant tubers are sprouted easily indoors with a shallow covering of slightly moist peat or vermiculite in warm conditions. Except for dwarf varieties allow only 1 or 2 shoots to develop from each root. An ideal garden location is one protected from strong winds and in full sun. Dahlias will tolerate some shade. Soil should be well prepared, humus and well drained. So be sure to dig your holes deep and work the soil all around. Enrich the soil with compost or well-rotted manure, and then work in a good organic fertilizer according to the instructions. With a well-prepared soil bed, your Dahlias will create beautiful growth very quickly.

Since most dahlias are fairly tall staking may be required. Plant tubers in a 15-20 cm (6-8 in) hole. Cover with 5 cm (2 in), as the plant begins to grow gradually raise the soil level until the hole is filled. (For "Pot Dahlias", use at least a 25 cm (10 in) pot, cover top of pot tuber with 5 cm (2 in) of soil.)

Lateral growth and more flowers can be encouraged by pinching out the centre growing tip when the plants are about 30 cm (12 in) high.

After killing frost in the fall, lift the plants, cut off the tops close to the tubers, rinse off the soil, dry and dust with fungicide. Store over winter in dry peat or vermiculite in a cool place. Check the tubers periodically for drying or mold. Add a small amount of water or improve air circulation as needed.

Even though they're often called bulbs, the roots of Dahlias are actually tubers (as in tuberous begonia). Dahlia tubers look a lot like a bunch of brown carrots, and the stems sprout directly from the tubers – the little budding sprouts that end up as thick strong stems are called "eyes."

Saving Dahlia Tubers in Fall

If you grow your dahlias in a hard-frost area - remember, the dahlia is really a tropical plant, so when frost hits them, it kills them instantly.

When this happens, here's all you have to do -it's really easy: Pull up the plants, chop off the stems a few inches above the tuber, wash off the dirt, and set the tubers in the fall sun to dry. You'll be amazed that many of your tubers will be two or three times the size they were when you planted them....which means all the more to plant next spring.

Once they're dry, put them in some sawdust or peat moss, and toss them in a big paper bag, then store them in a cool non-freezing spot in the cellar or garage until next spring. At that time, you may want to divide them, keeping at least 3 eyes per clump, or leave them whole for planting the great big clumps for great big growth.

Cutting Dahlia Flowers

You simply won't be able to resist. When you remove flowers for your arrangements, choose whole stems and try to maintain the basic shape of your plant. It will quickly try to replace the branch you remove, and the buds will keep coming – right up until frost.