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# Dahlias

Dahlias with their many shapes and colors add dramatic beauty to any garden. They will reward you with show stopping blooms from July until frost.

## Tuber size

Tuber size and shape does not affect plant growth. As long as a tuber has a healthy eye it will produce a plant.

## Location

The ideal location for Dahlias is in full sun; however, they tolerate some shade.

## Soil

Dahlias thrive in a loose well drained sandy soil with a neutral ph. Prepare your soil for planting by adding sand and organic matter (compost, aged manure). Adding lime sweetens your soil, lowering the acid content. Applying 4-20-20 fertilizer and/or manure two weeks before planting ensures that there are enough nutrients for the tuber to thrive.

## Planting

Planting after the last frost, mid-April to June is ideal planting time. Dahlias can vary in height from 1-7'. Check each variety for its rated height and plant where suitable. Taller varieties should be planted at the back of the garden and the lower growing varieties in front of between other plants. Dwarf varieties are ideal for borders or containers. Space Dahlias according to their bloom size; larger Dahlias should be planted 2-3' apart, while smaller dahlias can be planted 18' apart. Plant tubers 4-6" deep. Lay the tuber horizontally with the eye (bud) facing upward. Taller Dahlias need support stakes which should be placed as you are planting. They eye of the tuber should be next to the stake. Do not water tubers after planting; there is enough moisture in the soil to maintain tubers until they are about 6" tall.

## Watering

After tubers are about 6" tall, water once a week. Water more often when buds begin to form or during the heat of summer. A thorough deep watering is much better than a light sprinkling.

## Fertilizing

When Dahlias are 6" tall fertilize with fish fertilizer. Fish fertilizer has nitrogen which helps promote leafy growth. Later in the season, just when flowers begin to bloom apply a water-soluble fertilizer that is low in nitrogen but high in phosphorous and potash. Alaska more bloom (0-10-10) is ideal.

## **Pest Control**

As the growing tips emerge they are a favorite food for slugs. Place slug bait around your plants to protect them. Safer's slug bait is a safe for wildlife and pets. During summer keep an eye out for aphids, earwigs and spider mite. Later in the season a white powdery mildew may appear on the foliage. Spraying with a fungicide (Safer's Defender) will prevent it from spreading.

## **Pinching**

To grow a compact bushy plant with more flowers, pinch out the center growing tip when the Dahlia is about a foot high.

## **Disbudding**

For bigger blooms, better stems, and better flower quality, pinch off the side buds at the end of each growing branch.

## **Weeding**

Dahlias have surface roots, cultivate lightly around plants.

## **Cutting Flowers**

It is best to cut Dahlias early in the morning. To properly condition blooms, place them in water in a cool, dark place for six hours. While in your home keep them out of direct sunlight. Change the water every second day, recut the stems and your Dahlias should last up to a week.

## **Winter Storage**

After the first frost, cut Dahlias down, leaving only about 6" of stalk. Carefully dig the tuber out of the ground with a garden fork. Wash soil off the tubers with a hose. Then trim off thread like root hairs and any damaged tubers. Allow the tubers to air dry for a day in a protected area where they will not freeze or be exposed to direct sunlight. To prevent fungus disease, dust the tubers with sulphur or soak them in a gallon of water with 1-2tbsp. of bleach for 5-10 minutes. Store tubers in vermiculite, dampened sawdust or cedar shavings placed in open cardboard boxes. The tubers keep best if the storage area is cool. A garage or crawl space is usually a good place to store tubers. Check tubers several times during the winter. If the tubers begin to shrivel, dampen your vermiculite or sawdust.

## **Dividing Tubers**

You can divide tubers in the spring or fall. The eyes are easier to see in the spring, but the clumps are tougher to cut. Each tuber will need to have an eye (bud) which will appear where the tuber connects to the main stalk. Not all tubers on the clump will have an eye. Use a sharp knife or pruners to separate tubers, making sure to label them for identification purposes.

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15175 72nd Avenue, Surrey BC, V3S 2G3  
Tel. 604-590-2431

2560 West Broadway, Vancouver BC V6K 2G1  
Tel. 604-733-1534

HuntersGardenCentre.com

@HuntersGdnCtr