



We love dahlias and want to help you to love them too!  
The following is a brief introduction to dahlia care.

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**Growing Requirements** - Dahlia plants grow and bloom best in at least 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight and they love morning sunlight best. Choose a location with a bit of protection from the wind. Dahlias tolerate most soil types but prefer sandy, well-drained, slightly acidic soil with a pH of 6.2 to 7. If your soil is too heavy or has clay, add sand and peat moss to help lighten it. Water established Dahlias thoroughly and deeply once a week. Water more frequently if it is hot and dry. Water regularly during the growing season and fertilize with a low nitrogen feed several times until early fall. Dahlias like cool nights (they come from the mountain plateaus of Mexico and Guatemala), so growth and flowering peak as temperatures cool in late summer and early fall.

**Planting** - Don't be in a hurry to plant; dahlias will struggle in cold and wet soil. Dahlia tubers should not be planted until the danger of frost has passed and the soil temperature reaches 58 - 60 degrees F (we plant them a little after tomatoes or around Mother's Day). If, however, there is a risk of a late frost occurring, we recommend covering the dahlia plant with a row cover or some other form of protection. Excessively wet soil may cause tubers to rot, so you might want to wait for a drying trend if the weather has been wet and stormy.

**Tubers** - The smaller flowering types, usually about three feet tall, should be spaced two feet apart. The taller, larger flowering types should be spaced three feet apart. Dig and prepare a 12" diameter x 12" deep planting hole. Mix a shovel full of compost, a handful of bone meal, and a little dolomite lime into the soil that was removed. Otherwise, do not add any other fertilizers at planting. Fill the planting hole with the soil mixture until it is about 6" deep. Then place the dahlia tuber horizontally in the bottom of the hole with the "eye" pointing upward. This is a good time to drive a stake (to eventually support the plant) securely into the ground next to the portion of the tuber with the eye. An attached identification tag will be invaluable when it's time to dig up your tubers in the fall.

**Potted Dahlia Plants** - The planting hole should be around twice as large as the plant's root ball. Mix soil as above lay half in the hole and position the dahlia root ball so that the stem faces upwards. Pack the rest of the soil gently around the root ball and drive a supporting stake into the ground.

**Growing Tips** - To promote a more compact, bushy plant with more flowers, pinch off the center shoot just above the third set of leaves. Dahlias start blooming around eight weeks after planting, starting mid-July. Potted plants will give you a month's jump start on the season. For the finest cut flowers, cut them early in the day when they first open all the way. Place them in tepid water and change the water daily. Cut dahlia will last 5-7 days. To encourage more

vigorous flowering, dead-head by cutting spent blooms - or simply pick lots of bouquets! The more flowers you cut, the more the plant will bloom. Try to make the cut above a set of leaf nodes and side buds.

**What to do with Tubers in the Fall** - Dahlias are summer blooming tubers that are only hardy in USDA zones 7-11. Because Michigan is in zone 6b and dahlia tubers aren't frost hardy, they must be overwintered properly. Some gardeners consider them "too much hard work" because of the tedious process of lifting, cleaning off, prepping, and storing dahlias. If you google how to divide or store dahlia tubers, you will see many different methods. We feel the outstanding and unique beauty they bring to a garden is worth the effort. Where you store your tubers is critical. **The temperatures should be between 40 - 50 degrees and the humidity needs to be 80 - 90%. If your conditions vary significantly from these levels, your tuber will likely rot or shrivel.**

Our first frost date for zone 6b is forecasted to be around October 20<sup>th</sup>. That said it sometimes falls in mid-November. The normal procedure is to wait until the first hard frost when the dahlia stalks and leaves blacken. Then let them stay in the ground for at least a week before you lift them out. However, if the first week of November comes and goes with no hard frost, we recommend digging them up anyway.

Once you dig them up you can either carefully rinse them off or store them with the soil still on the tubers. Dividing the tubers requires some expertise. Either research the subject yourself and practice what you have learned, or we will be glad to show you how it is done. Normally, we divide at least half of our tubers in the fall and the remaining ones in the early spring. For the 2021-2022 overwintering period we began a new storage method that is more time-consuming to do, but the success rate is extremely high. We divide the tubers and let them scab over at least one night, do not skip this step regardless of your storage method. Once they are scabbed over, we wrap them in saran wrap. The American Dahlia Association uses this method. We resisted, due to the use of plastic, however, it is a game-changer for storing the tubers successfully.

We can help you to overwinter your tubers and store them in our root cellar with two caveats.

1. Volunteer for several hours so you can learn. We appreciate the help.
2. Take care of your tubers, which means dividing, wrapping, and labeling.

**Beware: If you're anything like us, once the dahlia bug bites you, you will be dreaming about dahlias for the rest of your life!**

**Our 2022 Annual Dahlia Fest is on the calendar! September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2 to 6 pm at the Farm!**