

The Dahlia is native to Mexico and was named after the Swedish botanist, Andreas Dahl.

LOCATION

Dahlias prefer full sun exposure, but will perform satisfactorily if given at least one half day of full sun. Any less than one half day of sun will produce plants that are spindly, with poor flower production. They will also be prone to powdery mildew.

SOIL PREPARATION

Prepare the soil as deep as possible. Adding compost or other quality soil amendments is very beneficial. If you prefer to fertilize prior to planting, work into the soil about 1/8th pound of a balanced granular fertilizer for each plant to be grown.

PLANTING

The biggest problem most gardeners have with Dahlias is tuber rot after planting. The key to avoiding this problem is not to plant into wet, cold soil. In Sonoma County, April 15th is the earliest that you should consider planting Dahlia tubers.

For all except bedding, mignon or orchid flowering Dahlias, pound a 1" x 1" x 5' stake into the ground where each tuber will be planted. The plants should be 3' apart except for the smaller types which can be spaced 2' apart. Dig planting holes 6" to 8" deep. Plant each tuber lying flat with the eye or sprout facing upwards, about 2" from the stake. Cover the tuber with 3" of fine soil. Reserve the remaining soil next to the hole.

GROWING

Allow only one sprout to develop; break or cut off all other sprouts if they occur. As the tuber grows, gradually fill the hole with the reserved soil, never covering the plant.

Tie the main stalk of the plant to the stake when it is about 2' tall. After that, as side branches develop, use twine or similar material to encircle the growth; tie loosely around the branches. The idea is just to support the branches to prevent them from breaking.

WATERING

If the ground is dry after you have planted your tubers, water once and then don't water again until the plant has produced a shoot above the soil. If you water tubers before they have sprouted, there is a very good chance that they will rot. After the plant is growing, water on a regular basis.

PESTS

Snails, slugs, earwigs and gophers love Dahlias. Protect your plants as needed against these problems before they occur.

FERTILIZING

As your plants grow, a regular supply of a balanced fertilizer is recommended. After the end of August, eliminate nitrogen from your fertilizer program. A fertilizer such as 0-10-10 is recommended. Excess nitrogen causes poor tuber survival during the winter while they are in storage.

Digging and Storing Tubers

By November, your plants should be about finished blooming. Remove any blooms and all buds. There won't be many. Quit watering and let your plants rest. From mid December through January is the time to dig and divide your plants.

Dig clumps carefully as it is quite easy to damage the clump to the point where nothing is salvageable. Use a shovel or fork spade to lift clumps. Begin digging about one foot away from the center of the plant. Lift the entire clump to ground level. Wash off all dirt using a spray nozzle.

Dividing clumps can best be accomplished with a Spary linoleum knife. Not all tubers have eyes. A tuber will not sprout unless it has at least one eye. The eyes are found at the top of the tuber on the ridge where the tuber joins the stem. When a tuber is removed from the clump, the ridge containing the eyes must be attached to the tuber. In some cases, this will require taking a piece of the stem as well.

Clean the tubers of all dirt. Trim the tuber free of roots or excess material. Let the tubers dry in the shade until moisture is gone from the surface of the tubers. This usually takes one to three days, depending on the conditions.

Either dip the tubers into a liquid fungicide or the dust the cut ends with a fungicide.

There are many different ways to store tubers. Plastic bags or some type of box works well. The container needs to contain enough coarse vermiculite to cover the tubers. Store in a cool, dark location. Tubers should be checked a few times while in storage. Remove any rotten or dried up tubers.