

FERNCLIFF GARDENS - DAHLIA CULTURAL INFORMATION

Dahlias with their countless shapes and colours, give constant satisfaction throughout their long blooming season. The ideal location is one protected from wind and in full sun. Planting too close to shrubs should be avoided. The soil should have good drainage. If you have heavier soil, work in sand or peat moss to lighten and loosen the texture of the soil for better drainage.

In shorter growing areas where earlier blooming is desired, the tubers may be sprouted by starting indoors with gentle warmth. Place them in shallow trays or boxes with drainage holes. Cover tubers with light peat moss or commercial soil substitute; position tubers so that the crown is not covered by soil. Moisten the soil with a trace of dampness and place flat in a warm location. When sprouts emerge place in a sunny window.

Soil should be well prepared. Add lime or dolomite lime if your soil is acidic. Dahlias like a low nitrogen fertilizer. Work in a 10-20-20 or 4-10-10 two weeks before planting. Fertilizers should not be placed directly in with the tubers when planting as this will cause burning.

A good time to plant is anytime between April 15 and May 30, bearing in mind local conditions. The soil should be warm, and is better a bit dry than wet. Place stakes where the tubers are to be planted. Remove about 5" of soil, sprinkle bone meal or superphosphate in the bottom of the hole and work it in. Place tuber in horizontal with the bud or sprout up near the stake cover it lightly with soil and firm the soil down. Do not water the tubers after planting. A sprinkle of Wilsons Bulb and Soil dust in the planting hole will ward off any insect pests in soil. As shoots begin to emerge, cover with more soil to ground level. When plants are firm and about one foot tall draw some soil around for support.

Slugs are very attracted to dahlia shoots. Bait at once with SLUG BAIT or SLUG PELLETS. Dahlias vary in height from one foot to seven feet. Check varieties for height and plant where suitable. Taller ones are usually in the background. Most dahlias should be spaced about 18"-24" apart. For low growing types plant closer.

Dahlias have shallow surface roots, so the soil surface should not be worked deeper than a couple of inches. A deep thorough watering is better than frequent lighter sprinkling. A really deep drenching is the best way to conserve moisture in the depth. Watering should be about once a week for established plants, or oftener if the weather is hot and the buds are forming rapidly.

As the plants grow soil can be drawn towards the stem (HILLING) and firm the support. Applying mulch is very beneficial; it controls weeds, conserves soil moisture, and helps stabilize soil temperature.

Lateral growth and more flowers can be encouraged by pinching out the center growing tip when the plants are about 20" high. Larger blooms for display can be developed by pinching out the side buds at the end of the growing branches to favour the center bud left to grow.

Keep an alert eye open for aphids. Aphids thrive in hot weather. Control should start before the first bud stage. Best time to take action is in the early evening. Follow label directions. Contact Ferncliff's website for control product names.

Get out there and enjoy your dahlias. Blooms cut for arrangements are best picked in the morning or evening. Remove old blooms after flowering.

Dahlia tubers should be dug after the first killing frost. The clumps can be safely lifted at the end of October- early November even if no frost has blackened the tops. Dahlia plants are cut down to about 6" and roots are lifted carefully with a shovel by digging around plant and lifting the clump carefully. Keep the correct name on each variety. Tapping the clump top or stem removes most of the dirt between tuber clumps. The stalks should be cut off to right above the clump.

We do not wash our clumps after digging. They store better and stay plumper with a little soil. Avoid excessive drying of clumps before storage.

Wrapping clumps is another way of storage; place them in deep boxes which have been lined with 9-10 thicknesses of newspaper. Use storage medium such as sand, peat moss or dry sawdust to prevent tubers from shriveling. Store in cool but frost free place where there is some air circulation, (temperature of 40-45F is ideal) It is idea good to check tubers several times during winter months to see how they are doing.

The clumps can be divided either in the fall or in the spring. When dahlias tubers are divided from the clump each tuber must have an eye to grow. The eyes are found around the crown. All cut surfaces should be allowed to dry thoroughly. Divided tubers can also be dipped in sulphur.

Thank you ENJOY YOUR DAHLIAS – visit us at www.ferncliffgardens.com