



Dahlias are some of gardening's greatest rock stars, providing countless opportunities for a showcase of floral extravagance. From 6-inch border plants to those towering as high as 7 feet, dahlias can take your garden to new heights!

History, Genetics, and Today's Cultivars

- Native to the mountains of Central America and the high plains of Mexico, dahlias' hollow stalks were used as drinking straws in ancient times.
- There are 42 accepted species in the dahlia genus. Dahlias have a unique genetic feature that allows for the creation of almost endless varieties. Dahlias have eight sets of chromosomes (most flowers and people have only two) allowing for almost limitless color variations, flower shapes, and sizes. New cultivars are constantly being developed. There are currently over 57,000 varieties registered globally.
- The American Dahlia Society (ADS) registers and classifies more than 10,000 dahlia cultivars in its official database. New varieties are developed and named by breeders and are often evaluated through trial gardens or accredited judging before being widely introduced or recognized.
- Dahlias are grouped based on flower size and shape. Flower forms include single, anemone, collarette, waterlily, decorative, ball, pompon, cactus, and semi-cactus types.

How to Grow

Dahlias grow from tubers, which are the enlarged, underground root that stores the plants' energy and nutrients. Garden centers and nurseries sell dahlias as potted plants or you can buy individual tubers.

- Dahlias can be propagated from cuttings or by dividing tubers. This method results in true replicas of the parent plant.
- Dahlias can also be propagated from seeds gathered from spent flower heads. This does not always result in true replicas of the parent plant. Some gardeners prefer growing from seed because next year's plants may grow a new, desirable cultivar.
- Frequent deadheading of spent flower heads is required to ensure continuous bloom.

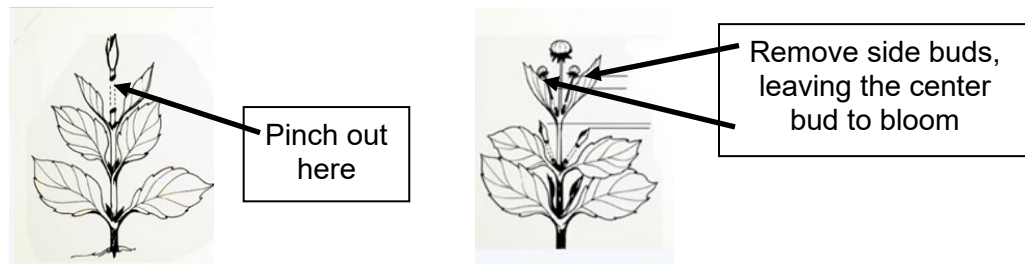
Location and Spacing

- Dahlias require 6-8 hours of sunlight but also appreciate shade during summer's extreme heat.

- They also require well-draining soil. Excess moisture will rot tubers and kill plants in poor-draining areas.

Fertilization and Cultivation

- Avoid using too much nitrogen because it will cause excessive growth, resulting in weak plants and stems. A balanced fertilizer such as 10-20-20 or 5-10-10 will provide sufficient potassium, which promotes good root development, and adequate phosphate, which improves blooming.
- Once roots are established and foliage appears, start watering, as necessary, to ensure plants receive 1" per week.
- Pinch out the center growth point when your plants are 6 to 12 inches tall to create a nice bushy plant with more laterals and more blooms.
- Branches produce three flower buds. Leave only the center bud for larger blooms with longer stems.



- It is important to keep dahlia beds free of weeds. Take extra care around the plant base, as dahlias have many surface roots. Hand weeding is recommended.
- Continue to support plants as they grow taller with cages or staking to prevent stalks from breaking.

Common Pests for Dahlias

- Earwigs, cucumber beetles, Japanese beetles, grasshoppers, thrips, aphids, and spider mites are common pests. Deer, rabbits, and snails also take a toll.
- Neem oil, beer traps (for slugs), hand-removing insects, and blasting them off with water are all common solutions for managing insects.

Diseases and Viruses

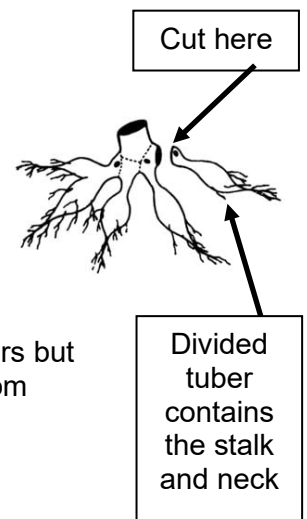
- Bacterial diseases such as crown or leafy galls can spread in soil and water. Fungal diseases like powdery mildew, botrytis blight, and verticillium wilt can be managed with fungicides. Viruses can be an issue with dahlias but aren't nearly as common.
- Diseases and viruses can be minimized by providing proper cultural care. Use good sanitation practices and modify conditions where feasible. Remove and

dispose of old blossoms, declining or diseased plant tissue, plant debris, fallen leaves, and weeds.

- Avoid wet foliage. Water at the base of the plants and not overhead. Improve air circulation around plants by following plant spacing guidelines. Remove branches and foliage within the plant to improve air circulation.

Digging, Dividing, and Overwinter Storage

- Using a garden fork or spade, loosen the soil around the entire plant. Gently lift the tubers from the ground, being careful not to break the necks of the tubers.
- Check for gall and throw away any clumps showing disease. Disinfect tools and refrain from growing dahlias in the same spot for a few years.
- Clean the soil from the tuber clumps using a garden hose. Clumps can either be left intact for the winter and divided in the spring, or they can be divided in the fall. Many gardeners find it easier to divide and store in the fall.
- Tubers should be allowed to dry and cure in the sun for a couple of days. Remember to label your stored dahlias. Special pens can write directly on the tubers.
- Divide, making sure to have part of the crown from the stalk, the neck and tuber's body attached. Toss tubers with broken necks or missing the crown. These will not sprout the next season.
- There are various ways to store dahlias over the winter. Tubers should be kept chilled (below 50°F but above freezing) and stored in a material like vermiculite, or wood shavings that maintains moisture around the tubers but allows air flow. Individual tubers can be wrapped in plastic placed apart from each other and covered in a refrigerator.



Sources

- Sorensen, Paul D. "REVISION OF THE GENUS DAHLIA (COMPOSITAE, HELIANTHEAE — COREOPSISIDINAE)." *Rhodora* 71, no. 786 (1969): 309–65. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/23311302>
- American Dahlia Society Classification Society, <https://www.dahlia.org/docsinfo/ocg/>
- [Integrated Pest Management for Floriculture and Nurseries](#) and [Pests of Landscape Trees and Shrubs: An Integrated Pest Management Guide](#), University of California Statewide Integrated Pest Management Program (UC IPM)

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