

## Delightful Dahlias Great for borders, flower beds, and cut flowers

The Dahlia, a native of Mexico, was grown by the Aztec Indians as early as the fourteenth century. The extremely wide color range and variety of flower types in the cultivated dahlias of today result in their being a most popular garden source of late summer and early fall flowers.

The color range includes variegated forms and solids in white and nearly all shades and tints of yellow, orange, red, pink and purple. The American Dahlia Society has established an official classification to cover the 20 different flower forms. Dahlias are grown as specimen plants in containers and urns, in mixed perennial borders, for cut flowers, and for bedding purposes. It's always a good idea to plant extra, as dahlias make wonderful cut flowers for the home.

### Dahlia Growing Tips

- ❖ Dahlias give best results when planted in full sun in a moist, well-drained garden loam.
- ❖ While they must have adequate moisture during the growing season, they will not be satisfactory if the soil is poorly drained. Where the soil is a heavy clay, it is best to prepare the ground by working in liberal amounts of well-rotted manure, peat moss or compost to a depth of 12 inches. This is done in spring or fall. If done in the fall, the ground should again be worked over in the spring and prepared for planting.
- ❖ An application of 5-10-5 or similar analysis granular fertilizer should be worked in at the rate of 3-5 lbs./100sq.foot. No further fertilizer containing nitrogen should be added during the growing season or the result will be vegetative growth and no flowers.
- ❖ In planting the tuberous roots, dig holes 4-6 inches deep (4 inches in heavy soil and 6 inches in

light soil) and wide enough to accommodate the tuber.

- ❖ Place the tuberous root flat in the hole in a horizontal position, with the eye or bud facing upwards. At the time of planting, it is advisable to put a 4-foot garden stake about 1 inch from the end of the root bearing the bud. The young plant can thus be given support all the time until it reaches full growth.

- ❖ Cover the root with 2-4 inches of soil. As the shoots grow, continue to fill in the hole until it is level with the surface of the soil. Not more than one tuber or root should be planted in a hole. This allows the plants to grow and spread, allows air to circulate among the plants, and provides ease of cultivation. The tuberous roots are planted when all danger of frost is past.

- ❖ As the plants grow, they should be tied to the stake that was set at planting time.

- ❖ It is important to keep weeds at bay for several reasons: they compete for soil moisture and can harbor pests like aphids which can transmit virus.



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- ❖ Apply mulch to reduce weeds, moderate soil temperatures and maintain needed soil moisture.
- ❖ Irrigation need only be considered during dry weather and applied infrequently but deeply, 1- 1 ½" every 7-10 days.
- ❖ Some dahlia varieties grow straight with a single stalk. In order to obtain symmetrical, well-branched plants, they should be pinched when about 1 foot high. Take out the top just above the second or third set of leaves.
- ❖ In general, pinching gives a better show of flowers in the pom-pom, mignon and bedding types. Other varieties produce too many stems, in which case some may be cut out.
- ❖ If large exhibition flowers are desired, the plants should be disbudded and the side shoots removed. This allows all the energy to go into producing show-type flowers.

### Propagation

The most popular method of propagation among gardeners is division of the roots. A large clump of

roots may be divided at any time after lifting, but it is best if done just prior to outdoor planting when the eyes or sprouts show distinctly.

- ❖ Use a clean, sharp knife to cut the clump of roots into divisions.
- ❖ Be careful not to injure the new buds.
- ❖ The tuberous roots are connected to the main stem at the region known as the crown. It is in this region that the new buds or eyes are produced. Each new division should consist of a tuberous root and an eye or bud.

Propagating dahlias from seed, especially the bedding types, is a relatively easy process. Seeds can be started under lights in the home in flats of a moist peat-lite mix. Generally, germination takes place in 14-21 days. Prick off the seedlings when you notice the first set of true leaves and transplant to a cell pack or pot. Move outside when all danger of frost has passed.

### Storing Dahlias

Dahlia roots should be dug immediately after frost has killed the top.

- ❖ In digging, lift the tubers carefully from the ground so they are not broken or injured.
- ❖ The soil should then be carefully pulled away from the roots with the hands. It is not wise to shake the soil from the clump as this may break the tuberous roots at the slender neck by which they are attached to the crown.
- ❖ Allow the plants to dry in the shade or a dry basement for a few days, cut back the stems to about 4 inches and clean up the tubers.
- ❖ Place them in flats or boxes.

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Whatever the method used to store tubers, they should be examined monthly. If roots are shriveling, it may be necessary to add a little moisture to the peat or vermiculite and give the containers more covering. If rot or mold has set in, discard infected tubers and provide greater air circulation. Storage temperatures is also very important. The ideal is between 40 and 45 degrees F. Do not let the roots freeze; store in a frost-free location.

### Plant Problems

#### Integrated Pest Management (IPM) Considerations

IPM is a common sense approach to pest control and plant care. It uses a number of measures to prevent, control or reduce plant problems. These include the use of:

- ❖ Resistant plant varieties, proper plant selection and placement.
- ❖ Good aftercare.
- ❖ Biological or mechanical controls.

Pesticides are typically used as a last resort; although an important tool in the IPM tool kit. When selecting a pesticide, consider the following points:

- ❖ Pick one that is least toxic.
- ❖ Consider humans, pets and natural predators.
- ❖ Make the application when it will be most effective in preventing, controlling or reducing the problem; as the saying goes 'timing is everything'.

Accurate diagnosis of the problem is key when determining control measures to employ. Bring a representative sample of the problem to your local

Cooperative Extension office or garden center for diagnosis and recommendation. Pesticide laws vary from state to state; always seek the advice of a professional.

### Diseases:

#### Botrytis blight

- ❖ Practice plant sanitation.
- ❖ When plants are not wet, carefully remove and destroy or discard affected plant parts or portions.
- ❖ In the autumn, rake and remove all garden debris.
- ❖ Water early in the day so the above ground plant parts will dry quickly.
- ❖ Avoid wetting foliage if possible.
- ❖ Avoid crowding plants to improve air circulation.
- ❖ Space accordingly to allow for air to circulate.
- ❖ Prune to thin plants or plantings.

#### Powdery mildew

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