

How to Grow Dahlias

A guide to growing dahlias and storing them for future seasons



At a Glance

Size: Varies from dinner plate to pompon

Sun: Part to full sun

Soil:

In the ground: Amend native soil with compost.

In pots: Good quality potting soil.

Water: Regularly at soil level rather than overhead. Keep evenly moist.

Fertilizer: Regular application of organic water-soluble plant food

Native to the Andes of South America, dahlias are one of the showiest annual flowers. They range in size from the huge dinner plate size to the very petite pompon varieties.

Where to Plant

Dahlias grow and flower best in sunny areas with well-draining soil. In Colorado most dahlias prefer a sheltered, morning sun location, although some varieties grow and bloom happily in full sun.

When to Plant

Dahlias like warm weather, and will not tolerate a frost, so don't rush to plant them outside. If you want to get an early start, plant the tubers in one gallon pots indoors about two to three weeks before the last frost date--late April to early May in the Denver area.

Once they have sprouted, place under grow lights or in a sunny window (south-facing window is best). When all danger of frost has passed, gently plant outdoors.

How to Grow

To plant, dig a large hole 6 to 12 inches deep, depending on the size of your dahlia. Add generous amounts of compost, or well-rotted manure and mix well into the bottom of the hole. Plant tubers 2 to 4 inches deep and 1 to 3 feet apart, depending on variety. Fill in with more compost and soil (a 50-50 mix). Growth begins in 14 to 20 days. Tall varieties, such as dinner plate dahlias, will need support for the large heavy blooms. Stakes or cages work fine.

Check for moisture and water regularly, especially during dry periods. Mulching with straw or bark helps retain moisture and suppress weeds. Water near the soil, rather than overhead, as the latter can contribute to powdery mildew.

Feed with an organic water-soluble plant food made for flowers. Fertilize regularly following package directions.

Lifting & Replanting Dahlias

The time to lift this year's dahlia is right after the first frost blackens the foliage. Remove the foliage. Cut back the stem, leaving about 4 or 5 inches attached to the tuber.

Using a pitchfork about 12 to 18" from the main stem, gently loosen the soil. The larger the plant, the larger the work area. Gently lift the root/tuber, taking special care not to damage it. Carefully remove the soil from around each tuber.

To carefully remove heavy clay, it is helpful to use a hose. Turn the stem upside down to drain the fluid out of the stem.

Dust the tubers with sulfate of ammonia to protect them from any fungus. Place the tubers in moist peat moss. Keep them in a well ventilated, cool (but not cold) area. Keep tubers out of the sun and away from heat sources.

In the early spring, green sprouts will emerge. Water the tubers sparingly to keep the compost/peat moss moist. In the spring, once all danger of frost has passed, choose a partly sunny, sheltered area in the garden and prepare a *deep* planting hole. The hole should be larger than the tuber.

Add generous amounts of well rotted manure or compost and mix well into the bottom of the hole. Carefully lower the tuber into the prepared hole. Add more compost and soil (50/50 compost to soil) around the plant as necessary to raise the soil level. Add a stake at this time, taking care not to damage the tuber.

Gently firm the soil around the tuber, making sure there are no gaps that might create air pockets. Water the area and mulch.