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How to Grow Dahlias: The Complete Dahlia Flower Guide



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Botanical Name:

Dahlia spp.

Plant Type:

Flower

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Planting, Growing, and Caring for Dahlias

By [Catherine Boeckmann](#)
Last Updated: April 3, 2025



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Dahlias are breathtakingly gorgeous flowers that come in every color of the rainbow. The tubers are planted in late spring. Learn more about planting, growing, and caring for dazzling dahlia flowers.

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About Dahlia Flowers

Picking a favorite dahlia is like going through a button box! The flowers can range in size from petite 2-inch lollipop-style pompoms to giant 15-inch “dinner plates.” Most varieties grow 4 to 5 feet tall. Dahlias grow in a wide range of beautiful colors, including white, yellow, orange,

purple and black, light blend, bronze,
flame, dark blend, variegated and bicolor!

Dahlia is a genus of tuberous plants that are members of the Asteraceae family.

The tubers are planted in the ground in late spring (around the month of May) and generally flower from July to the first autumn frosts. Dahlias are perfect for a border garden and make lovely cut flowers. Growing vegetables? Put a row of dahlias on the border, where they will not shade your edibles.

Are Dahlias Perennials or Annuals?

Dahlias are tender perennials in their native warm climate of Mexico. In the United States, they are considered perennials in hardiness Zones 8 and higher. [See the USDA hardiness zone page.](#)

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However, in colder regions (Zones 7 and lower), dahlias are treated as annuals. That said, some gardeners have had luck keeping the dahlias in the ground in Zones 6 and 7.

Luckily, cold-weather gardeners can also just dig up the tubers after the first fall frost and store them in the garage until spring. Learn how to dig up dahlias in the guide below.



Read Next

- [How to Grow Elephant Ears: The](#)

[Guide](#)

- [20 Easy-to-Grow Perennial Flowers for Beginners](#)

PLANTING

Dahlias thrive in 6 to 8 hours of direct sun, especially morning sunlight, and they benefit from protection from wind.

Consider their size at maturity when planting. They grow best in rich, well-draining soil with a pH of 6.0 to 7.5.

Amend heavy clay soil with aged manure or compost to lighten and loosen the soil texture for better drainage.

When to Plant Dahlias

- Dahlias will not tolerate cold soil. Plant when the soil reaches 60°F (15°C) and any danger of frost has passed.
- Planting dahlias a few days after [tomatoes](#) are planted in the ground is a good rule of thumb.
- Some gardeners start tubers indoors in containers a month ahead to get a jump on the season. Medium- to



How to Plant Dahlias

Avoid planting dahlia tubers that appear wrinkled or rotten. Pink “eyes” (buds) or a little green growth are good signs.

- Plant **large dahlias** and those grown solely as cut flowers in a dedicated plot where they will be free from competition from other plants. Set tubers in rows spaced 3 feet apart. If you plant dahlias about 1 foot apart, they make an excellent flowering hedge and will support each other.
- Plant **medium- to low-height dahlias**, usually in the 3-foot tall range, among other summer flowers. Set them 2 feet apart.
- Plant the **smallest bedding dahlias**, grown from seed, 9 to 12 inches apart.

Start by digging a 6- to 8-inch deep hole to plant the tubers. It also helps to mix some compost and a handful of bonemeal into the planting hole. Otherwise, do not fertilize at planting.

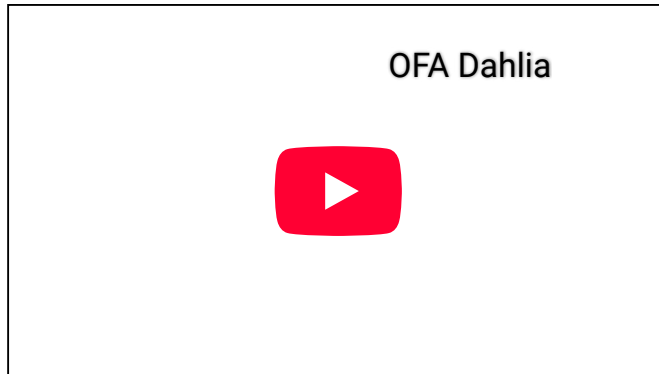
- Set a tuber into the hole with the growing points, or “eyes,” facing up.
- Do not break or cut individual dahlia tubers (as you would with potatoes).
- Cover the tuber with 2 to 3 inches of soil. (Some say 1 inch is adequate.)
- As the stem sprouts, fill in with soil until it is at ground level.
- Do not water the tubers right after planting. This encourages rot. Wait until the sprouts have appeared above the soil, then water.
- Do not spread mulch. Dahlias prefer sun on their roots, plus mulch harbors slugs.
- Tall, large-flower cultivars require support. Place 5- to 6-foot stakes around plants and tie stems to them as the plants grow.
- Dahlias begin blooming about 8 weeks

Medium- to dwarf-size dahlias do well in containers that have drainage and are big enough to support the plant at maturity. Generally, a 12x12-inch container will suffice.

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- Use a soilless mix and co-polymer moisture-retaining crystals, per the package's guidance.
- Follow the depth requirements.
- Cover the tuber with a few inches of soil-crystal mix.
- Spray water on the tuber, if necessary, until growth starts.
- Do not water if the soil is damp 1 inch below the surface.

Check out our video to learn more about growing dahlias in your garden:



GROWING

When dahlias are established, water 2 or 3 times a week and more in hot, dry climates. Be prepared to tend to plants before or after rain, when open blooms (especially large ones) fill up with water or take a beating from the wind.

Dahlia Growing Tips

- After sprouting, dahlias benefit from a low-nitrogen, liquid fertilizer, such as 5-10-10 or 10-20-20. Fertilize every 3 to 4 weeks from sprouting in midsummer until early autumn. Do not over-fertilize, especially with nitrogen, or

- When plants are about 1 foot tall, pinch out 3 to 4 inches of the center branch to encourage bushier plants and increase stem count and stem length.
- For large flowers, try disbudding: Remove the two smaller buds next to the central one in a flower cluster. The plant will put all its energy into fewer but considerably larger flowers.
- Bedding dahlias need no staking or disbudding. Simply pinch the center shoot just above the third set of leaves to encourage bushiness.
- For more blooms, deadhead as flowers fade; deadheading keeps the flowers blooming for months!



Types

There are about 60,000 named varieties

larette, and waterlily. Here are some popular choices:

- **‘Bishop of Llandaff’**: small, scarlet, intense flowers; handsome, dark-burgundy foliage; 3 feet tall
- **‘Miss Rose Fletcher’**: an elegant, spiky, pink cactus plant with 6-inch globes of long, quilled, shell-pink petals; 4 feet tall
- **‘Bonne Esperance’**, aka **‘Good Hope’**: dwarf variety that bears 1-1/2-inch, rosy-pink flowers all summer that are reminiscent of Victorian bedding dahlias; 1-foot tall
- **‘Kidd’s Climax’**: the ultimate in irrational beauty with 10-inch “dinnerplate” flowers with hundreds of pink petals suffused with gold; 3-1/2 feet tall
- **‘Jersey’s Beauty’**: 4- to 6-inch hand-size pink flowers in fall; 4 to 6 feet tall

We recommend checking out the [National Dahlia Society](#) for more information about specific varieties.



HARVESTING

The more you cut dahlias, the more they'll bloom! For a bouquet, cut stems in the morning before the heat of the day and put them into a bucket of cool water. Remove the stems' bottom leaves and place the flowers into a vase of water. Place the vase in a cool spot and out of direct sun. Check the water daily. Vase life is about 7 days.

Digging Up and Storing Dahlia Tubers

Dahlias are hardy to Zone 8; in these more temperate regions, dahlias can simply be cut back and their tubers left in the ground through winter, covered with sev-

ter in the ground; others have had varied results. It all depends on the severity of winter; native to Mexico, dahlias won't survive freezing temperatures. → [Find your USDA Hardiness Zone here](#).

In Zones 8 and north, dig up (lift) and store tuberous roots in late fall; tubers can be expensive, and this will save you the money that would otherwise go into buying new ones each year. [See your fall frost dates](#)

- Dahlia foliage blackens with the first frost. Take it as a warning to begin digging up the tubers. Complete the task before a hard frost.
- Cut off blackened foliage, leaving 2 to 4 inches of top growth.
- Carefully dig around tubers with a pitchfork, garden fork, or shovel. Avoid damaging them.
- Lift the clump and gently shake off the soil.
- Cut off rotten tubers.
- Leave clumps outside in the sun up-

- Pack them in loose, fluffy material (e.g., vermiculite, dry sand).
- Store in a well-ventilated, frost-free space: 40° to 45°F is ideal, 35° to 50°F is acceptable.
- Check on the Dahlia tubers occasionally over the winter. Remove any tubers that have started to rot before the decay spreads to healthy tubers.

Readying for Summer

In spring, separate healthy tubers from the parent clump and discard wrinkled or rotten ones. Plan to plant the survivors. Each tuber must have at least one “eye” or piece of the crown attached, or it will not develop into a blooming plant. The eyes are little pink bumps at the base of the stem. → [See our gardener’s article on how to unpack and divide your stored dahlia tubers!](#)

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If this all seems like too much bother or you do not have the right storage place, skip it all and treat dahlias as annuals, buying new tubers in the spring.

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PESTS/DISEASES

Diseases: Botrytis blight; southern blight; crown gall; powdery mildew; smut; virus;

nematodes; slugs and snails; thrips;
spider mites

WIT AND WISDOM

- The dahlia was named after Anders Dahl (Swedish botanist), born on March 17, 1751.
- Dahlias are a member of the Asteraceae family, which also includes sunflower, daisy, chrysanthemum, zinnia, and, of course, aster.
- In the 16th century, dahlias grew wild on the hillsides in parts of Mexico. There, they were “discovered” by the Spanish.
- Both dahlia flowers and tubers are edible. The tubers taste like a cross between a potato and a radish.
- Dahlias were often grown in front of hollyhocks to hide their “shins.”

*The Dahlia you brought to our isle
Your praises forever shall speak
‘Mid gardens as sweet as your smile
And colour as bright as your cheek.*

FLOWERS

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Catherine Boeckmann



Catherine Boeckmann loves nature, stargazing, and gardening so it's not surprising that she and The Old Farmer's Almanac found each other. She leads digital content for the Almanac website, and is also a certified master gardener in the state of Indiana. [Read More from Catherine Boeckmann](#)

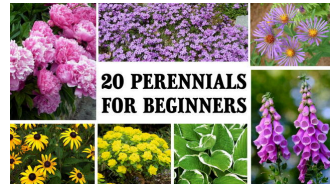
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COMMENTS

ADD A COMMENT

Eva Eskridge (not verified) 8 months 3 weeks ago

My dahlia is in a container. It is loaded with buds but they don't make flowers. What is the problem?

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REPLY

The Editors 8 months 2 weeks ago

Hi Eva,

There could be a few reasons why your dahlia buds are not opening. The first thing would be to examine your watering practices. Waterlogged roots from excessive water can affect the buds' ability to open. Also, if your dahlia was planted in poorly draining potting mix or a container that holds water it can lead to too much water

also be an issue, as container planted dahlias need consistent watering because the potting mix dries out a lot faster than those planted in the ground.

If your watering schedule is consistent, it could be an underlying pest issue. If the stems and leaves appear normal but buds are not opening, check them for small holes to determine if thrips or earwigs have punctured or chewed them. Buds that have been repeatedly affected by these pests might not open properly.

Another issue could be excess fertilization in the form of too much nitrogen. If the plant is overfertilized, it will grow luscious foliage at the expense of flowers.

Hope this helps!

REPLY

I bought two medium size dahlias and repotted in a medium size pot each in April. I live in Gibraltar where we have a hot climate. they were beautiful and blooming, I have always kept dahlias, I now have them on my balcony. Suddenly they have started to die down and all the foilage has dried up. I have removed all the dead stalks and foilage and now only have the tuber. Not sure what has happened here, will they survive. I am watering and feeding once a week, but its been 3 weeks now and I see no sign of life. Appreciate any feedback. thanks

REPLY

The Editors 10 months 3 weeks ago

Hi, Subia. We are sorry to hear about your dahlias. They can be fickle plants in hot climates, as they prefer warm days and cooler nights. Here are a few things to try to revive your plants: Add organic matter to your containers. Keep watering (do not soak), and try adding some mulch on top to cool them down. Also, if your

fails, we highly recommend looking into getting a heat-tolerant variety. They may perform better in your climate.

REPLY

Dollie (not verified) 10 months 3 weeks ago
June 11, 2024 - I just bought a "potted" Dahlia that has the most beautiful blooms. I live in zone 6 and want to keep it in a container so I don't have to dig the tubers and can move it inside to winter. Can I move it to a larger pot/container? If so, can I re-pot it now or wait until it finishes blooming? Thank you.

REPLY

The Editors 10 months 3 weeks ago
Hi Dollie,

Dahlias certainly are beautiful. You definitely want to wait until it has finished blooming, but it is best to wait

point, you could transplant your tuber to a new container with fresh potting mix and store indoors in a cool, dark room for the winter. But it would probably make more sense to simply remove the tuber from the current container and store it as outlined above for the winter before then putting the tuber in a new container in the spring. That way you don't have to lug the new, larger container (which will be heavier) in this fall and out again next spring.

Good luck!

REPLY

marleene smith (not verified) 1 year 1 month ago

I live in NE Indiana. Last fall a friend surprised me with a beautiful bouquet of Dahlias and I fell in love with them. I am a new at gardener. I want to add Dahlias to my gardens but am overwhelmed by all of the information below. Is

dening experience before attempting them?

What are your thoughts please?

REPLY

Carol (not verified) 11 months ago

Growing dahlias is so easy and the sprout up pretty quickly. I planted mine well after Easter and several are over 3 feet high and have beautiful blooms. I do try to cut back and leave just one bloom per stem, making the ones you keep larger. Enjoy!

REPLY

The Editors 1 year 1 month ago

Hi Marleene,

It's not hard to see why you fell in love with dahlias!

Gardening is all about trying new things, so if you want to grow dahlias

plant tubers and not start from seed.

For the first year, you can start small and plant only a couple tubers to see how it goes.

There are a few things you want to remember: Don't plant your tubers until after all threat of frost has passed. Plant them in an area that gets lots of sunlight (6 to 8 hours). When you do plant, make sure to follow the steps outlined above.

Since your location is in growing zone 6a, you will want to treat your dahlias as an annual, meaning you want to lift them from the garden in the fall and store indoors during the winter months and then plant again in the spring.

And to get an idea of what dahlia varieties grow best in your area, check with your local gardening center or reach out to your local cooperative extension for guidance.

REPLY

Marykirsch@com... (not verified) 1 year 2 months ago

What about Dahlia seeds? I would also love some guidance on beachside gardening.
Thanks

REPLY

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