

# Planting and Caring for Dahlias

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**E**XCEPT in heavy clay, dahlias will grow almost anywhere, but a sunny locality, with rich, mellow soil, that will grow potatoes, will give the best results. Fertilization should be done in the fall. Use well-rotted cow manure, and work it in thoroughly, turning the earth over many times before freezing weather, and again in the spring, before planting.

In Canada, planting time should never be earlier than May 20th, nor later than June 20th. Do not plant in soil that is wet or sour. If soil is heavy and soggy, add a goodly proportion of sand and air-slacked lime. This will lighten and sweeten it. Never plant when soil is wet, or your tubers may rot.

Do not plant when the soil is cold. Wait until the sun has warmed it. At an early period put your hand down into the soil, and feel how cold it is, then later test it in the same way for a higher temperature. A cold soil retards, while a warm soil hastens vegetation. Dahlias grow rapidly. You will not lose time by waiting.

If your dahlia bed was not fertilized in the fall, use only well rotted manure sparingly, as early in the spring as possible. One good method is to dig out the soil to the depth of ten inches, fill in with two inches of well-rotted manure, and stamp it down, then cover with an inch of soil well packed, upon which place your tuber; then cover but be careful not to over-fertilize at this period.

## A WARM EXPOSURE NEEDED

Dahlias revel in the warm sunshine. If possible plant them so that they will be exposed to sunshine all day long. But if you have a small town or city lot with close board fences, good results can be obtained by planting on the northern or eastern sides, twenty-four inches from the fence. I have grown dahlias on all sides of my lot, and find the eastern and northern localities the best.

Remember, that the soil in the beds that are near the fence, should be much lighter than in the open, because the fence shadows it at one time of the day, while the heat reflecting from the fence at another time of the day will, if the soil is heavy, bake it to a crust. This baking, or incrustation, interferes considerably with what may be termed soil atmosphere, and necessitates a double amount of cultivation. My rule is that wherever there is much shadow, use the lighter soil. In the open sunlight, a mellow, medium heavy soil is preferable. A light soil requires more fertilizing

than a heavy, while, after planting, a heavy soil requires more cultivation than a light.

## SELECTING DAHLIAS

There are nine distinct classes of dahlias, namely, show, fancy, decorative, cactus, single, ponpon, collorette, peony-flowering and scented—the latter being the newest thing on record. In each class, there are many varieties with individual characteristics. The best time to select a dahlia is when it is in bloom; therefore, visit dahlia farms, make a record of the varieties you best like, and send in your orders early in the spring, dealing always with reliable people. See that each tuber has a bud sprouted before planting, or you will be disappointed, when, after long anticipation, no plant appears. Bear in mind that there are blind tubers, and these produce nothing. Sometimes you may receive two or three tubers in a cluster, with but one eye appearing. This is a strong root, and should not be separated. Plant it as you receive it, and anticipate a better bush and bloom because of the cluster.

## HOW TO PLANT

The ideal method of planting a dahlia tuber is well worth considering. Dig a hole eight inches deep. Place the tubers in the bottom horizontally, with the eye uppermost, then cover with about two inches of earth. As the sprout develops, fill in the soil until the level is reached.

I do not approve of pinching out the centre of the sprout, as some advise, but I do advocate staking. I would recommend setting the stake before planting. There will then be no danger of driving it through the tuber. Always place the eye, or bud end of the tuber, directly opposite the stake, and about four inches from it. Attach the label firmly to the stake the moment you remove it from the tuber. A dahlia without a name is of no interest, and while handling and planting, tabulating should be very carefully done.

When the plant is eighteen or twenty inches high, tie it to the stake with a strip of strong cloth, about an inch, or an inch and a half wide, being careful not to pull the stem from its natural direction, and keep elevating the bandage as the plant develops. I paint my stakes green, and use green-colored cloth for tying. This relieves the unsightliness of staking. Stakes should be at least three feet above ground, and, in some cases, two feet longer. Never plant closer than two and a half feet between each hill, and four feet between each row.

Do not water. Nature will do that in the best way possible. Artificial watering produces a rank growth of stalk at the expense of the bloom, with a tuber that will shrivel up and, perhaps, rot during the dormant period. Therefore, let me reiterate, *do not water*. If the season becomes excessively hot and dry, an occasional *soaking* may be advisable, but using the hose every evening is the greatest mistake you can possibly make, since it proves detrimental to the bloom.

Cultivation is the proper thing, and let me state just here, that any one who has an aversion to the use of the hoe, should never attempt to grow dahlias. Keeping a crust from forming on the soil about the stalk is absolutely imperative. The soil should be broken and mellowed, all weeds and suckers carefully removed, and not more than one shoot allowed to develop from a hill.

Your lawn clippings will make an excellent grass mulch, which will prevent the soil from baking and drying out. Hoeing twice a week, will improve the soil atmosphere. Always replace the mulch after hoeing. Fine, strawless, stable manure, or street sweepings, will also make a good mulch, but do not use manure until after the buds begin to form, nor cultivate so deeply as before. Buds, as a rule, begin to show when the plant is from eighteen to twenty inches high, and will be in bloom when the plant is about thirty inches high.

Later in the season, should the flowers diminish in size, use liquid manure once or twice a week, or a top dressing of fine bone meal, four parts, to nitrate of soda, one part, spread broadcast over the hill, and cover with a light sprinkling of soil, always replacing the mulch. A better bloom will be the result. If there is any sign of mildew, remove the mulch for a while, to let the earth dry out a little.

Disbudding throughout the bush and cutting back the lower branches will also enhance the bloom. I always trim out the lower flower shoots, as they never do well, and the strength expended upon them will be saved for the better part of the plant. The removal of all dead and faded flowers is necessary for the better appearance of the plant, and its further sustenance.

For decorative purposes, never cut a bloom in the heat of mid-day. The flowers are usually in a half-wilted condition then, and cannot be easily revived. Early in the evening is the best time for cutting, as it is cooler, and the flowers have a chance to harden during the night.