

Latin Name/Genus: *Dahlia* spp.

Family: Asteraceae

Difficulty: Easy

Season: Warm Season

Exposure: Full sun

Zone: Hardy perennial to Zone 8 (typically grown as an annual)



Timing: Dahlia tubers can be started in containers indoors (they like large containers, at least 30cm (12") deep and wide), transplanting or transferring outdoors once threat of frost has passed; plant tubers outdoors directly in a location that receives full sunlight after the threat of frost has passed and soil has warmed to 15°C (60°F). If located in an area that's especially hot in summer, find an area in your garden with mid-afternoon shade for your Dahlias.

Starting: To grow from seed, start Dahlia seeds 4-5 weeks prior to last frost in seedling start mix, in a seedling tray, on a sunny window ledge, keeping the soil moist; once sprouted, allow seedlings to form one true set of leaves prior to transplanting each seedling to its own container; once outdoor temperatures have reached 65-70°F, transplant seedlings outdoors. Alternatively, Dahlia tubers can be planted 5-15cm (2-6") deep, depending on the variety; place smaller varieties at least 30cm (12") apart, and larger varieties at least 1m (3') apart for proper air circulation – do not water tubers after planting in spring until green growth sprouts above the soil surface, as they do not require watering prior to root development. Once tubers sprout, water plants deeply weekly, increasing to twice a week or more during dry spells – never let the soil dry out; once tubers have sprouted, pinch off the top stem just above the highest set of branches to encourage more buds. Dahlias reach maturity and start blooming approximately 8-10 weeks after planting in late spring

Growing: Dahlias prefer rich, loamy soil full of organic matter/compost, with a neutral pH of around 6.5; if your soil is more of a denser clay, add sand, manure, or peat moss to loosen soil texture for better drainage. Prune Dahlias once the plant is approximately 40cm (16") in height by pinching the top tips off above sets of healthy leaves, therefore assisting the plant grow multiple new stems. Dahlias may topple over and wilt in the heat of the summer – this is how the plant adapts to stress – ensure the soil is moist, and the plants should perk up again once the sun goes down. Propagating Dahlias can be done from cuttings of tubers sprouts in the spring, or from dividing overwintered tubers in early spring. If bringing tubers indoors for winter, cut healthiest plants back to 10cm (4") above the ground after the first hard frost, then leave tubers in the ground for a week before digging up each root ball, starting at least 30cm (1') from the stem; allow root ball to air dry in a place that is sheltered from frost and direct light; either bag and store whole root ball, or carefully separate tubers, storing them individually; ensure storage area has temperatures between 4-10°C (40-50°F) and a little humidity so they don't dry out – do not let tubers freeze. Please note Dahlias are toxic to both dogs and cats, so make sure they are kept in an area inaccessible to these pets.



Dahlia *Plant Care Information*

Nutrient Preferences: Dahlias are heavy feeders, encouraging more, bigger blooms – use fertilizers high in phosphorus to promote blooming; avoid fertilizers high in nitrogen, as they promote foliage growth instead of blooms. If you plan to dig up your tubers for overwinter storage, ensure you cease feedings by September to prepare tubers for dormancy.

Blooms: Dahlias are late-season flowers, blooming from June until the first frost; the blooming stage can last for up to 3 months. Deadhead faded blooms to encourage flowering (and keep the plant looking healthy), as does staking your plants to deter them from drooping.

Disease & Pests: Dahlias are prone to powdery mildew, stem rot, and other fungal diseases, which is why spacing out your plants is so important in providing good air circulation; ensure you are watering at the base of the plant to help keep foliage dry; ensure soil is amended prior to planting – do not overwater; if you notice an infection on your plants, treat with neem oil or other natural solution. If Dahlias are overwatered, plant leaves may turn yellow and feel soggy to the touch, or blooms may feel dry or crispy if roots are waterlogged; cut back on watering frequency if necessary. Common pests of Dahlias include caterpillars, occasionally deer, earwigs, slugs (specifically when foliage is young/tender), and thrips – keep an eye out for these, using protection/deterrences when necessary.

Companion Planting: Dahlias appreciate being planted near allium, anise, artemisia, aster, bee balm, Black-eyed Susan, coneflower, cilantro, costal lavender, cosmos, cranesbill, crocosmia, daylily, fountain grass, geranium, Joe Pye weed, Lady's mantle, nasturtium, peonies, rosemary, snapdragon, sweet alyssum, tulips, yarrow, and zinnia.