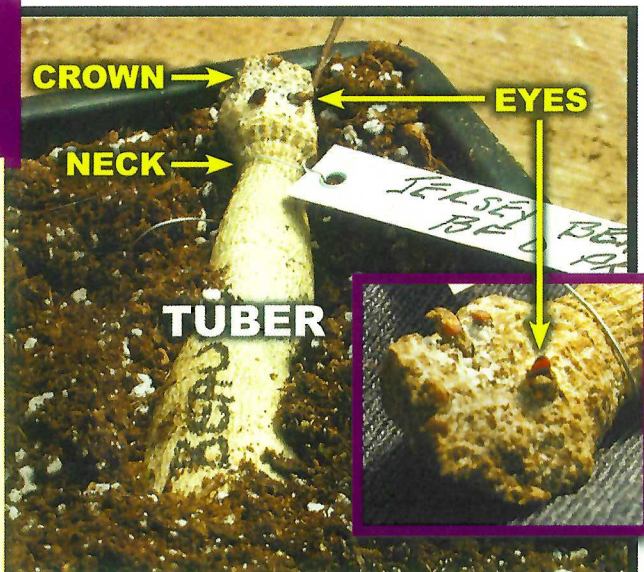


1 Starting

Examine your dahlia tubers for visible eyes. These eyes are the start of your dahlia plant. The inset shows new eyes and this tuber is ready to be placed in a tray with some moist potting soil. The picture shows the tuber placed in the potting soil with the eye portion out of the soil. (Note the tag on the tuber to identify the variety.) Once you have detected an eye, do not worry if you can't see the eye. Just place the tuber in the soil with the crown elevated. The crown attaches to the neck of a tuber and bulges somewhat.



Continue to "bench" up your tubers, making sure each is tagged with the variety name. Allow enough space for growth as you place them in the tray of potting soil.

2 Benching



Approximately two weeks later you will see the whole tray of tagged tubers growing well and with ample room. The tags are easy to read and the spacing of individual tubers makes it easy to groom. These tubers are ready for planting. If the garden plot is not quite ready or if a possibility of a late frost exists, you can pot your plants in 8" plastic pots, which will accommodate additional growth. This system of preparing plants assures later success in the garden.

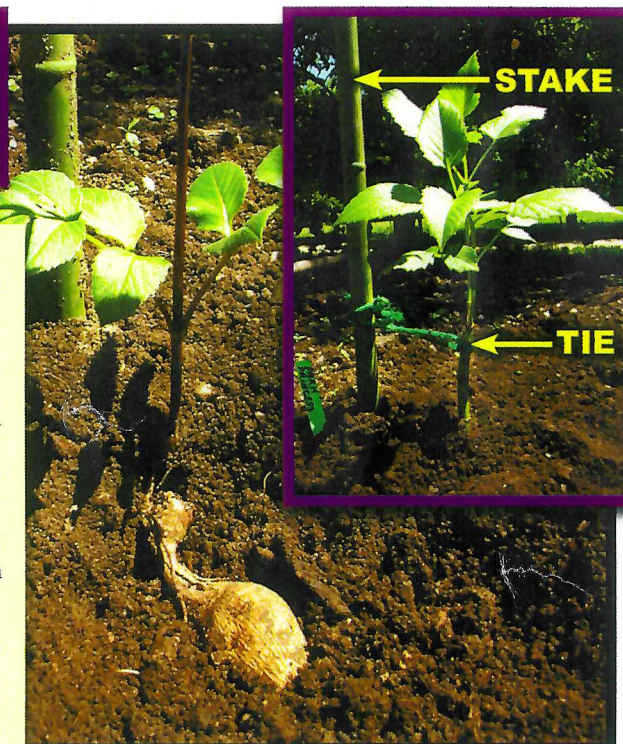
3 Buying

A great way to get a quick start on your dahlia season is by purchasing tubers and rooted cuttings. Tubers and cuttings purchased from a reputable source are the best way to introduce new varieties to your garden. Cuttings are easy to plant and because they have already developed leaves and roots, they will mature quickly and produce blooms in 60-80 days after planting. Like all dahlias, cuttings will develop tubers that can be divided and stored in the fall.



4 Planting

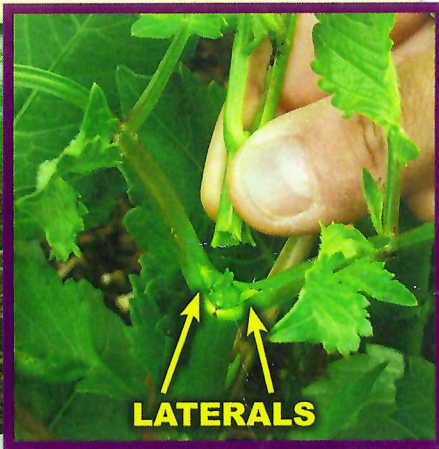
While your tubers and plants are growing in trays or pots, prepare your garden plot for planting. Till the soil as soon as it is dry enough to work. At this time, add a good amount of compost and/or dehydrated cow manure, carefully mixing it into the soil. Stake out your garden allowing from two to three feet between each stake and four feet between each row. After all danger of frost is passed, begin planting your established dahlia plants. Digging a shallow four to six inch hole, place the growing plant in the hole and cover with soil. In the inset, note the stake with tie to support the plant.



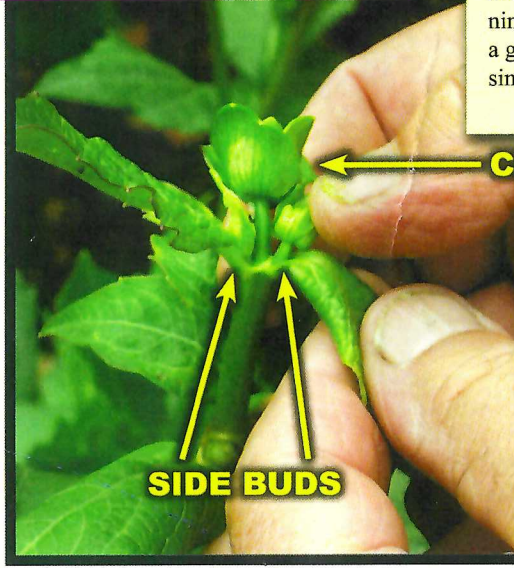
5 Topping



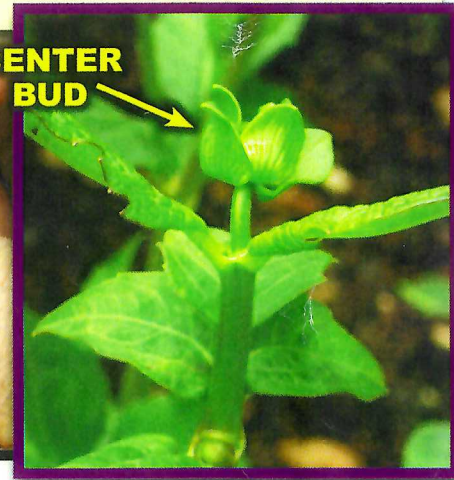
The picture shows your plant growing well. Once your dahlia plant attains from three to six pairs of leaves, it is time to "top" or "stop" the plant. This may sound cruel, but it is necessary in order to have well-formed plants with lots of flowers. The inset shows the growing tip being removed. At the break you can see two small laterals that will grow and give you two flowers instead of one.



6 Disbudding



After topping your plant, it will grow rapidly and in a short time each lateral will have buds that in less than a month will produce blooms. As the bud swells you will note two small side buds and these must be removed to allow the center bud to develop into a stunning bloom. As this bud and lateral grow, it is a good practice to tie the lateral to the stake since the flower will get quite heavy.



7 Cutting



Cutting your blooms for display in your home or as a gift for a friend is one of the true joys of growing dahlias. Here are a few tips to help your blooms last longer and stay fresh:

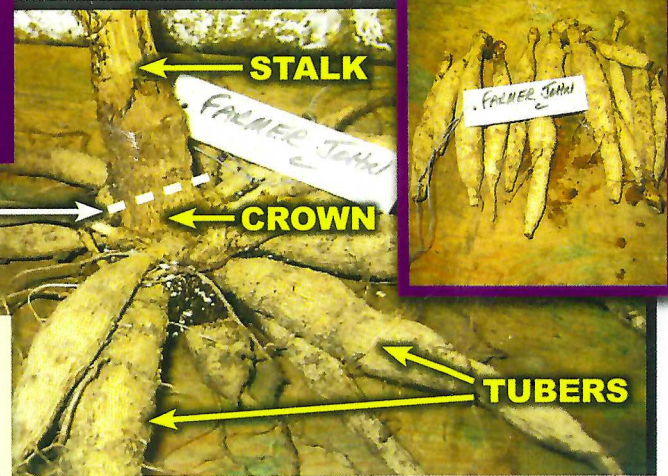
- Cut early in the morning when the plant is full of water.
- Cut stems long enough and on an angle. Always use a sharp knife to cut stems.
- Pull off leaves that will be under water to help keep the water clean.
- Keep a filled container with you as you cut, so the stems will be in water immediately.
- Use a "cut flower preservative" to extend the dahlia's vase life. Most floral stores or supply houses have this preservative.
- If the water in the vase gets cloudy or greenish, remove the dahlias, recut the stems and refill the vase with fresh water and preservative.

Following these tips, you can expect your dahlias to last 8 to 10 days after being cut.

8 Storing



After a killing frost, cut down the dahlia plants leaving about 6" of stalk above ground. In a week to ten days time, dig the plants for winter storage. Before you dig, be sure to attach the name tag to the remaining stalk. After washing off excess dirt, you can cut the individual tubers from the stalk, leaving a portion of the crown intact, which is where next year's eyes will appear.



After the individual tubers have been labeled with an indelible marker, "cure" the tubers by placing them on several sheets of newspaper in a cool area. Cover the tubers with additional newspaper. After a few days or a week the tubers should be cured and can then be placed in a cardboard box that has been lined with newspaper. Place the box in an area that stays cool but doesn't freeze; 45 to 55 degrees F. Check the boxes monthly and remove any rotten or shriveled tubers.