

# Digging, Dividing and Storing Dahlia Tubers

## Removing Tubers from Ground

- **Before digging be sure to attach a tag to the stalk identifying the plant**
- A long-handled round point shovel should be inserted about 18" from the stalk (some tubers are very long!) using a gentle prying motion
- This should be repeated on all sides in order to loosen all of the soil around the plant
- Once the soil is loosened on all sides you can pry the clump up with the shovel and gently lift the clump by the stalk being careful not to break the necks of the tubers
- Shake the clump to remove the dirt
- Some individuals use a hose to wash the dirt off the tubers, although this step is not necessary
- You must allow the tubers to dry in a frost-free area (**not on a cement slab**) overnight

## Dividing Tubers (minimally)

- Most people divide their dahlia clumps in the Fall and store individual or small clumps
- Minimally you should trim the stalk to 1" or less and divide the clump in half by cutting through the stem
  - While the tubers are designed to go into dormancy, the stems are not and will rot, the rot can spread to the crown destroying the tuber
  - Dividing the stem in half will allow it to dry out and reduce the chances of crown rot in the tubers

## Dividing Tubers (completely)

- Use by-pass hand pruners, garden scissors, lopping shears, and a sharp knife (be careful) to divide your clumps.
- The first step in dividing your clump is to remove all root material from the ends of the tubers
- Then remove the easy to separate tubers. These are obvious to see as they may be higher on the stalk or protrude noticeably from the crown (swollen area at the base of the stalk where the tubers form and where the eyes can be seen).
  - Remove these tubers with a sharp knife or with garden scissors.
- Next, using lopping shears, cut off the stalk of the clump as close to the crown as possible. Then using the lopping shears again or your hand pruners split the clump in half. This will give you two easy to work with pieces of tuber clump.
- You should now be able to easily divide the halved clump by using your hand pruners, garden scissors or knife.
- Make sure you leave an eye with each division. Eyes are only located on the crown of the clump and can usually be located with a little practice.
- You should get several tubers from most clumps, although very skinny tubers often don't make it through the winter.
- The final step in dividing your dahlia clump is to clean up the ends of each removed tuber.
- With your knife and scissors, cut off as much stalk tissue as you possible can without harming the eye of the tuber.
- The stalk tissue of a dahlia is different than the tissue of the tubers and is more susceptible to rot. Remove as much of this material as possible.

- Your tubers are now ready for storage. **Also, to prevent the spread of virus, rotate your cutting utensils between a 10% solution of bleach, water with a few squirts of Dawn dish detergent and finally plain water before dividing the next clump.**

## Treating Your Dahlia Tubers For Winter Storage:

- Many people treat their tubers with a fungicide to kill any fungus or bacteria that might be lurking on the tubers and will prevent its spread during storage
- Common fungicides:
  - Bleach solution:--Soak the divided tubers in a bleach solution (one cup bleach to three gallons of water) for 15 or 20 minutes.
  - Powdered sulfur—place some in a bag, add tubers and shake
  - Ban Rot— ½ cup powder to 5 gallons of water, soak tubers for 5-10 minutes , then allow to dry before storage (**note: this chemical is toxic!! and should be handled with care**)
  - Many don't do anything

## Storing Dahlia Tubers

- There are a variety of methods:
  - Storing in vermiculite, wood chips or similar material
  - Storing tubers in pots (assuming plant was grown in pot)
  - Storing in perforated zip lock bags
  - Wrapping tubers in saran wrap
- The key is finding a method that doesn't promote rot (too wet) or shriveling (too dry)

### Using a storage medium and bags or boxes:

- place 5 to 8 tubers in a 1-gallon zip lock storage bag along with 2 or 3 cups of **coarse vermiculite** or other material (woodchips, sawdust, dried cheap potting soil)
- Quart size bags work well for 4 or fewer tubers or very small tubers.
- What vermiculite does better than any other storage medium is to absorb excess moisture given off by the stored tubers.
- Seal and store bags of tubers in cardboard boxes or plastic tubs.

### Using Vegetable Storage Bags

- Ziplock bags can be perforated using a wall paper cutting tool available in most hardware stores
- Tubers are placed directly in bag (5-6 tubers) with no medium
- Bags are stored in boxes

#### Advantages:

- Requires less space
- Easy to check tubers during the winter
- Bags can be labeled eliminating need to label individual tubers
- Method seems to maintain proper moisture levels for tubers

### Dahlia Storage—saranwrap

Tubers can be wrapped in saranwrap and stored in boxes following the steps shown in the diagram below:



Sulfured- Ready for wrapping



First wrap



Second wrap



Third wrap



Fourth wrap



Fifth wrap



Five tubers bundled



Labeled - ready for packing

### Storage Environment

- It's very important that your storage area does not freeze. The ideal temperature for stored dahlias is between 40-50°—but at least below 60°
- Check on your stored tubers once a month to make sure they are not rotting or shriveling. If they seem too moist then repack with dry vermiculite.
- If they are drying out then spray a little water into the bag. Any rotting material should be removed immediately.
- The ideal storage location would be an old root cellar.
- Most of us, however, will have to make due with a less efficient location. The crawl space under the house, an unheated but insulated garage