

# Growing Dahlias

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SEMDS Grow Guide



<http://www.semnds.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Time-to-plant-tubers-and-plants-2019-r1.pdf>

ADS Grow Guide



<http://www.semnds.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Dahlia-Growing-ADS.pdf>

Starting Dahlias Indoors and Out



<http://www.semnds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Start-Dahlia-Tubers-Indoors-20190216.pdf>

## I have tubers, now what?

You can **plant tubers directly into the soil**. Soil needs to be 60°F and dry enough that a fistful of soil doesn't clump into a ball. Plant when you would plant tomatoes, historic last frost in southeastern Michigan is Memorial Day.

Put in a stake (~4-5' high). Transfer tag/label to stake.

Dig hole 4" deep, lay tuber on its side. Cover with soil.

<http://www.semnds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Start-Dahlia-Tubers-Indoors-20190216.pdf>

You can **pre-pot tubers** to give them a head start. Water to make soil moist, plant the tuber, then don't water until the plant starts to grow.

Begin to **Harden off** your plants a week before you plan to transplant. Take them outside, in the shade, for a few hours a day. Bring them in at night. Transplant when you would plant tomatoes. Safest bet is to wait until Memorial Day weekend.

## No, I bought a plant:

**Plants from Cuttings** - Cutting must be kept moist because they only have roots to feed them [name labels are on stick tags]. If the cutting starts to wilt, invert a clear plastic cup over the plant to act as a greenhouse for about a week. Vent the greenhouse by tilting the cup. Remove the cup a week later. Harden off before transplanting, see above.

**Plants from Tubers** - Potted tubers should be water gently as overwatering can result in rotting the tuber [name labels are on orange tape stuck to pot]. Harden off before transplanting, see above.

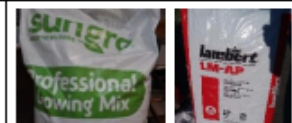
<http://www.semnds.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Start-Dahlia-Tubers-Indoors-20190216.pdf>



# Get ready to plant Dahlias!

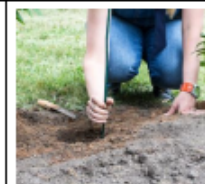
## Option #1 – Start your tubers in pots

- Some gardeners start tubers indoors 1-2 months ahead to get a jump on the season.
- Use LC1 professional growing mix. You want your potting soil to be moist. I mix soil and water in a 5 gallon bucket to achieve correct moisture level.
- You don't want the soil too wet. Moisten until the soil holds together when you squeeze in your hand. If water drips from soil it is too wet.
- Place the soil in pot sized to hold the tuber. Make sure pot has drainage holes.
- I like using 1 quart clear plastic deli containers to plant my tubers. Drill holes in bottom. I buy at Gordon Foods.
- Plant as you would in the ground with eye pointing up with crown just above soil level.
- Place pots in a bright, sunny location. You can put under grow lights.
- Don't water during the first few weeks. Too much water will cause tuber to rot.
- Your potted tubers will grow stem and roots (deli containers let you see the roots).
- In the warmer weather of May (in Michigan) you can start to acclimate your plants by moving them outside during the day but bring them back in at night (garage works).
- Plant in the ground when soil outside is 60°F. Follow Option #2 instructions.



## Option #2 – Plant tubers directly in the ground

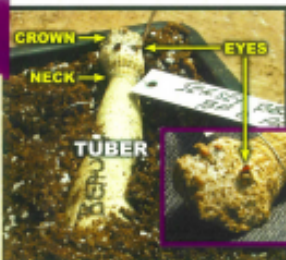
- Don't be in a hurry to plant; dahlias will struggle in cold soil. Ground temperature should reach 60°F. Wait until all danger of spring frost is past before planting. (Try planting them a little after the tomato plants go in.)
- Select a planting site with full sun. Dahlias grow more blooms with 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight.
- Dahlias thrive in rich, well-drained soil. The pH level of your soil should be 6.5-7.0, slightly acidic.
- Plant your dahlias 2-3 feet apart.
- Plant tuber with the eye facing up, about 6 to 8 inches deep. The crown should be below soil level.
- Plant your potted tubers in the same manner with the crown below soil level.





## 1 Starting

Examine your dahlia tubers for viable eyes. These eyes are the start of your dahlia plant. The next 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. (Place the tag on the tuber to identify the variety.) Once you have identified 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 roots. The tags are easy to read and the spacing of individual tubers makes it easy to grow. 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 3" 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 flowers in 60-90 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 depleted eye manure, carefully mixing it into the soil. Stake out your garden allowing three 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 furrow six inch wide, place the growing plant in the hole and cover with soil. In the last, 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 "snip" the plant. This may sound cruel, but it is necessary in order to have well-formed plants with lots of flowers. The next 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 flowers. As the buds swell you will note small side buds and these must be removed to allow the center bud to develop into a stunning flower. 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 blade to cut stems.
- Pull off leaves that will be under water to help keep the water clean.
- Use a 3 liter container with you as you cut, so the stems will be in water immediately.
- Use a "rot 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 gaseous, remove the dahlias, scrub 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 same 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 rot or shriveled tubers.



# Learn more about Dahlias



## Time to Plant Outside

### Care after planting

- ▶ Do not water the tubers right after planting; this encourages rot. Wait until the stems are 4-6" tall before watering.
- ▶ Do not cover the dahlias with mulch or bark.
- ▶ After dahlias are established, provide a deep watering 2 to 3 times a week.
- ▶ Don't forget to label your plantings, or make a map of what dahlia variety is planted where, if you want to keep track of your dahlias. This is good to do if you plan on participating in dahlia exhibitions or sharing your tubers with other growers.

