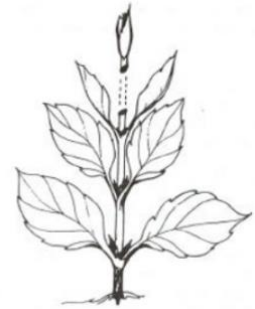


Why should I “top” my Dahlia Plants?

Pinching or "topping" dahlias results in shorter, sturdier, fuller dahlia plants that produce more blooms. This is true for the dwarf dahlias, the dinner plate dahlias and every style and size in between.

Pinching back your dahlias should be done when your plants are 12-16" tall. Pinch off the top of the plant just above the 4th set of leaves. Pinching off the top of the plant is referred to as "topping" your dahlia plant.

Removing the top of your dahlia plant temporarily refocuses the plant's energies from producing flower buds, and instead the plant develops more stems and more foliage - capable of producing and supporting many more blooms. You and your garden will benefit from topping your dahlias!

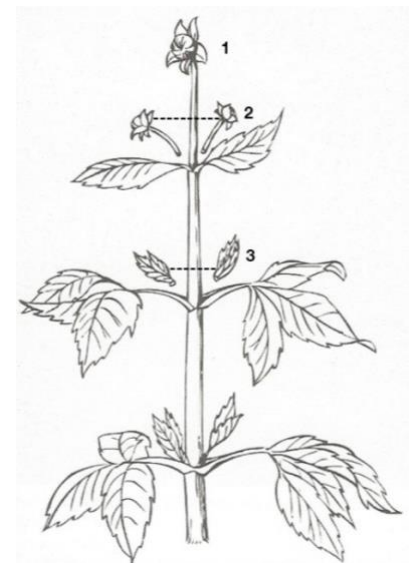


How to... disbud and disbranch.

by Richard Parshall

Disbudding and disbranching are two grooming chores that need to be regularly attended to after the lateral branches of your dahlia plants begin to develop flowering buds at their tips. Disbudding should be practiced by all dahlia growers, not just those who exhibit at shows. It is the removal of the two side buds next to the central bud at the end of each lateral branch. By removing these two side buds when they are very small (pea sized), you will find that the center bud, now without competition, will grow a longer and stronger stem. The flower that develops will also be larger because all of the lateral branch's energy will be diverted into the single flower instead of three flowers. Those of you who only grow your dahlias for beautiful bouquets will benefit greatly by the longer and stronger stems and larger flowers. Of course, even better stems and bigger flowers can be achieved by removing more buds (technically branches) further down the lateral branch. Rule of thumb for the number of leaves to go down for disbudding different sized dahlias:

- All dahlias – disbud at least two side buds at lateral tip (2)
- Miniatures, miniature balls, and other types – disbud two side buds at lateral tip (2)
- Smalls, balls and waterlilies – disbud two sets of leaves (2) and (3)
- Mediums – disbud three sets of leaves
- Larges and giants – disbud all the way down the lateral branch



Lateral branch

As when topping, disbudding should be done early in the morning or in the evening when the dahlia plants are crisp with moisture. The buds will break cleaner when they are not all rubbery from mid-day heat. Use the thumb nail or finger nail to remove as much of the bud stem as possible.



Disbranching is the practice of removing lateral branches from a dahlia stalk. This is done for several reasons. First is that you will get larger blooms on your larger flowering varieties if only 3 to 5 flowering branches are left on each plant. Leave 5 to 8 branches on your medium sized flowers. The smaller flowering varieties need no disbranching. A second reason for disbranching is to control the size and shape of the dahlia bush. A third reason is to open up your dahlia bush to better air circulation which helps prevent powdery mildew and other fungus diseases. The actual removal of the branch should be done carefully so as to do as little damage to the plant as possible. First remove the leaf below the branch that is to be removed and then gently bend the branch downward until it breaks away from the main stalk.

