



Dahlias

Dahlias are the unsurpassed darlings of the summer garden. Their spectacular color and exotic shapes make them stand out in a border or bed. Their hardiness and low maintenance make them a favorite with gardeners all over the country.

Purchase quality dahlia tubers in spring. Select tubers that are large, free of nicks, cuts or signs of rot. They should feel firm when gently squeezed between your fingers.

Select a planting location that receives full sun. It's very important to wait until the soil has warmed before you plant dahlia tubers in the ground. April or May, depending on your region, is an ideal time to plant. Planting in cool soil will stunt the growth and the plants will languish.

Amend the soil with organic compost prior to planting. The compost should be worked into the existing soil to a depth of 18 inches. Dahlias grow quickly and require excellent growing conditions to perform at their best.

Dig a large planting hole that is at least twice as deep as the length of the dahlia tuber, deeper if possible and equally as wide. Add a tablespoon of super-phosphate fertilizer to the bottom of each planting hole. The fertilizer will provide the nutrients necessary to develop root growth.

Place the tuber in the bottom of the hole and fill in the soil only to the top of the stem. The hole should remain partially filled with just the top of the stem sticking up until you begin to see growth.

Fill in the hole gradually to cover the new growth as the tuber begins to grow. Covering the stem inch by inch as it grows causes the stem to grow strong so that it will support the flowers.

Begin watering when the plants are actively growing aboveground. Water deeply to encourage strong roots.

Dahlias are available in a multitude of varieties. There are tree dahlias, miniatures, dwarf and hybrids. The flower forms are; anemone, collarets, orchid, peony, balls, cactus and singles.

Larger varieties may need to be staked as the plants grow. Use bamboo or plastic stakes placed on either side of the plant for support. A tomato cage can also provide support - install it when the plant is still small. When staking dahlias, be careful to not pierce the tubers.

Dahlias require regular, deep watering. Uneven watering will cause burnt leaves and weak stems.