

DAHLIAS are easy to grow and will add some wonderful colours to your garden. They are tolerant of a wide range of soil types and situations but perform best in fertile, well-drained soil in full sun. Prepare the soil using compost, well rotted manure or a general NPK fertilizer.

- Encourage the tubers into growth by planting in (large) pots in April. Use good quality peat free potting compost. Keep in the tunnel or greenhouse and plant outside when all danger of frost is over – May to early June.
- Can also be planted directly into the soil. Tubers should be planted 10-15cm deep
- Stake as required and pinch out shoots to promote bushiness (see pruning and training below)
- Keep well-watered and once flowers appear feed with a high potash liquid feed every two weeks from July to early September.
- Watch out for slugs! Dahlias are quite a favourite.

Pruning and training dahlias

- Insert canes on planting and tie in as growth develops
- Pinch out growing tips once plants reach a height of about 40cm to encourage branching
- For giant blooms restrict the number of flowering stems to three to five per plant; for smaller blooms allow seven to 10 flowering stems per plant
- Poor flowering can be due to overfeeding with high nitrogen fertilisers, not enough direct sunshine or too dry at the roots. Deadhead as flowers fade.

Overwintering

Cut plants to the ground after the first frosts have blackened the foliage. In mild regions and on well-drained soils, leave the tubers in the ground and cover with a deep layer of compost or leaf mould to protect them from frost. In colder areas or on heavy soils, lift and store the tubers (see below) and replant the following spring.

Lifting and storage

- Cut foliage and use a fork to carefully prise plants out of the soil. Remove any soil.
- Place tubers in open trays and pack with a peat-free compost or dry sand, just covering the tubers but leaving the crown exposed
- Store in a dry, cool, frost-free place. Cover if the weather is frosty.

Propagation

- Divide the tubers when shoots are 2-3cm tall by separating them into portions ensuring each section has both roots and shoots.
- Pot each section into a separate container and grow on.