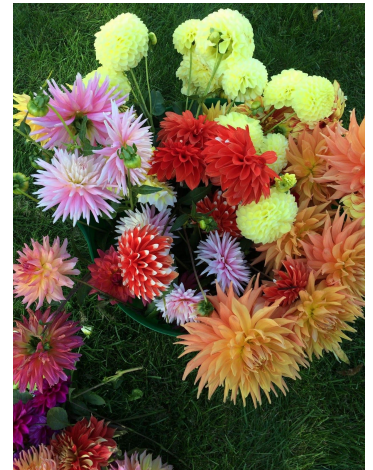


DAHLIA TIPS FOR THE FALL

This is the time when Dahlias are their most beautiful. They will continue to bloom until the first killing frost. Dahlia shows highlighting these beautiful flowers are usually held in September across the nation.



Fertilizing should be stopped by late August to encourage tubers to store nutrients for survival over the winter.

Zone 6 is not mild enough to leave tubers in the ground over winter. They cannot survive in the harsh winter conditions, and need to be dug up and stored inside. This is a careful, meticulous process and every Dahlia grower has their preferred methods.

WHEN TO DIG

A killing frost freezes and kills every Dahlia stalk. If there has not been a killing frost by the first week of November, dig up the tubers then. Try to pick a time when it is still warm enough to be comfortable outside using a hose to wash tubers.

The first step is to cut off all the stalks leaving 2-3 inches. Then allow 1-2 weeks for the tubers to harden. Whether it is 1 or 2 weeks is also dictated by weather. Some growers protect the cut end of the stalk with foil or other material, but that is not necessary.



THEN DIG!

Using a shovel, dig around the cut stalk in a circle 12-18 inches in diameter. Allow enough space from the stalk to avoid cutting the tuber. Tubers with a cut neck will not grow. Carefully dig up, lift, and remove the tuber clump with a pitchfork or shovel.

WATCH OUT FOR LABELS! From the moment tubers come out of the ground be constantly vigilant that their labels stay with each tuber clump. It's best to place a label on the tuber, another in the ground and one on the stake used to support the plant when growing.

WASH!

Place your tubers in a basket or a container that allows you to wash them and have the dirt and water to go through. One suggestion is to use a mesh compost sieve riddler set on top of a wheelbarrow. Wash the tubers gently with the spray nozzle on low but do it thoroughly, being careful not to break any tuber necks. Allow the tubers to dry. This is the step where labels can easily get separated from their tuber.

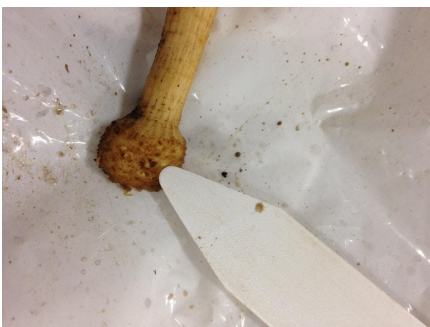


TRIM AND DIP

Keep the clumps and tubers on tables or another elevated work surface. Do not put them on a concrete floor which can fatally chill them. They also will not dry as fast. If you have old towels, you may dry the tubers on towels on tables. While drying, do not leave the tubers outside overnight if the temperature gets below 35 degrees. If they are outside or in a garage, a temperature below 35 degrees can kill them.



Most of the clumps are large and each tuber is full of feeder roots that have grown outward to feed the plant. Trim off all the feeder roots with pruners or garden scissors. Cut off any small skinny necked tubers in the clump. These skinny necked tubers will not grow the following year. Remove the large "mother" tuber. This is the original tuber that produced the plant. It is big and old looking and has a different color. This tuber will not produce a plant again.



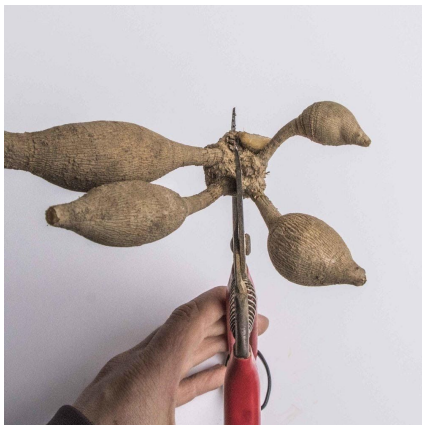
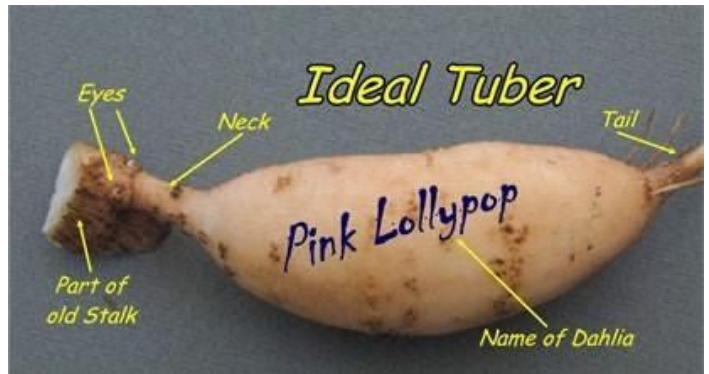
Before storage, the tubers must be left alone to dry thoroughly. This can take 2-5 days. Any cuts in the tuber from trimming must heal for 24-48 hours.

Some growers dip their tubers or clumps in a 10% Borax solution or 10% Clorox solution to fight fungus. Others treat their tubers with powdered Sulphur or another type of fungicide. Other growers don't use a fungicide and can successfully store them. Making sure the tubers are completely dry is the key to successfully storing them. Again, watch out for those labels!

D-I-V-I-D-E

Many growers divide their tubers in the fall. It makes them easier to store and quick to pot in the spring, but it is harder to see that critical EYE. Every tuber **MUST** have an eye, or it will not grow. Eyes are found at the top of the tuber where it joins the stem. To be viable, a tuber must have an eye and part of the stem. Cut big clumps into manageable

smaller clumps of whole tubers and then divide those in the spring. The eyes are easier to see and many have started to sprout. It's so exciting to take a tuber out of its bag and see a sprout already started.



You will need shears, scissors, knives, and some growers find a PVC pipe cutter helpful. Tubers may be hard to cut! Clean all cutting tools after dividing a clump of tubers. This will reduce the risk of spreading disease from one clump to another.

PACK AND STORE

Your now dry clumps or single tubers must be packed up and put into a storage medium, with their labels of course. They can be put into plastic bags, plastic boxes, or some use Styrofoam grape boxes. The tubers are then covered with medium. Storage mediums include peat moss, a peat moss/vermiculite mixture, vermiculite alone, wood shavings, sawdust, or even potting soil. A new method some have tried and like, is to wrap a bunch of individual tubers in plastic wrap. They are then stored in a refrigerator.

The bags of tubers should be placed in a box or tub to protect them from light during their winter rest. Mold, rot, and shriveling are the things to look out for which can destroy Dahlias. Check your tubers each month over the winter. If you

see rot or notice a tuber is mushy, discard it immediately. It will destroy the whole bag. If some are moldy, spray them with Lysol and wipe. If shriveled, spritz them with water. Tubers need to be moist but not too moist, and dry but not too dry.



In late February bring them out of the dark, open the containers and bags inside at room temperature and keep them in light to wake them up.

From fall digging, to putting them away can take several weeks. This is especially true for those with hundreds of tubers to take care of. But once inside out of the elements you can take your time to do it.

The storage temperature for Dahlias should ideally be around 45 degrees F. A range of 35-50 degrees F is suggested. Keep them in the dark if possible.

This description of digging and storing has been simplified somewhat in order to keep it from seeming too overwhelming. It is a labor of love. As the tubers are put into winter storage, many Dahlia growers are already thinking of new tubers to grow next year. Is it worth it? Yes! That first bloom makes it all worthwhile.

By: Master Gardener Debbie Lestz Teahan

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