

Dahlia Planting Guide

Everything you need to plant, grow, and overwinter beautiful dahlias.

Planting Time

Timing: Plant outdoors only after all danger of frost has passed and nighttime temperatures remain consistently above freezing.

Soil temperature: Wait until soil temperatures reach at least 60°F to encourage strong sprouting and reduce tuber rot.

Typical window: Late April through May in cooler climates, and March through early April in warmer regions.

Important note: Tubers lacking eyes will never sprout, even if they appear firm, plump, and disease-free.

Site & Soil

Exposure: Provide at least six to eight hours of direct sunlight daily for strong stems and abundant flowering. Morning sun with light afternoon shade improves performance in regions with intense summer heat.

Air circulation: Open planting areas with good airflow help prevent powdery mildew and other fungal diseases.

Soil type: Loose, fertile, well-drained soil prevents tuber decay during wet periods. Incorporate compost, leaf mold, or aged manure to improve drainage, fertility, and soil structure.

Planting Depth & Spacing

Depth: Plant tubers six to eight inches deep to anchor tall plants and protect developing roots.

Orientation: Lay tubers horizontally with the eye facing upward to encourage straight, even shoot emergence.

Spacing: Space plants twelve to thirty-six inches apart depending on mature variety size and airflow requirements.

Important note: Deeper planting improves stability, reduces wind damage, and helps prevent top-heavy plants from snapping later in the season.

Fertilizer & Mulch

Fertilizer type: Use low-nitrogen formulations such as 5-10-10 or 10-20-20 that emphasize phosphorus and potassium to promote flowering rather than excessive foliage.

Frequency: Feed plants every three to four weeks from early summer until early September.

Mulch timing: Mulch only after soil has warmed and plants are well established.

Why: Mulching conserves moisture, suppresses weeds, moderates soil temperature, and protects shallow feeder roots.

Pruning & Bloom Care

Pinching: Remove the central growing tip when plants reach twelve to sixteen inches tall. Pinching encourages branching, sturdier stems, and significantly increased flower production.

Deadheading: Remove spent blooms promptly to redirect energy toward continuous bud development.

Bloom maintenance: Regular cutting and deadheading significantly extend bloom duration and stem production.

Cutting flowers: Harvest blooms early in the morning or evening when stems are fully hydrated. Cut flowers when buds are three-quarters open.

Note: Bloom size, stem length, and color intensity often improve as the season progresses.

Watering

Before emergence: Keep soil mostly dry after planting, as excessive moisture before sprouting frequently causes tuber rot.

After emergence: Water deeply two to three times per week once shoots appear and active growth begins.

Best practice: Apply water at soil level to minimize foliage wetness and reduce disease risk.

Staking & Support

Installation: Install stakes or cages at planting time to avoid damaging developing tubers later in the season.

Height: Tall varieties typically require four- to six-foot supports for adequate wind protection.

Benefit: Proper support prevents stem breakage, lodging, and flower damage during summer storms.

Digging, Storing & Dividing Tubers

After frost: Allow frost to blacken foliage naturally before lifting tubers from the ground, then cut stems back to four to six inches once foliage has collapsed. Dig carefully with a fork to avoid breaking fragile necks and crowns.

Storage: Store tubers between 40–50°F in a frost-free, dark, well-ventilated location with moist peat moss, vermiculite, or wood shavings to prevent dehydration. Inspect monthly and remove any tubers showing rot or mold.

Dividing: Divide tubers in spring shortly before planting for easiest eye identification. Each division must include at least one viable eye attached to the crown.