

BRECK'S.
Dahlia Lovers

DAHLIA PLANTING HANDBOOK

Simple Steps to Ensure a Lifetime of Beauty



BRECK'S® DAHLIA PLANTING HANDBOOK

When you receive your field-grown dahlia tubers

Your dahlias are shipped as tubers. The tubers are field grown and have been harvested recently.

If you don't have time to plant immediately, keep the dahlia tubers in their original bags at about 40–45°F (4–7°C). The vegetable drawer of a refrigerator is ideal for temporary storage. Quick planting, however, will yield the best results.

Dahlias are frost tender. Your tubers can go directly into the ground in the spring after the ground has warmed and the chance of frost has passed. One good guideline is to plant dahlias at the same time you would plant tomatoes. If you want early blooms, start the tubers indoors in good light about a month before you plant them outside. Dahlias can be planted as late as mid-June in most parts of the country.



Site selection—where to plant your dahlias

Choose a site with the following characteristics:

- Full sun to partial shade

- Well-drained soil of any type, from clay to sand, and any pH level

Full sun produces sturdier dahlias, but sites with morning sun and afternoon shade, or dappled sun throughout the day, are also acceptable. During the summer months, make sure the soil does not dry out; insufficient moisture causes slow growth, fewer flowers and yellowing of the foliage. Dahlias are tolerant of a wide range of pH, and adjusting the pH is normally not necessary.

Preparing the site/working the soil

It is worth taking the time to dig a proper hole and amend the soil. You'll get bigger, healthier plants with more flowers.

Spade or rototill the soil to a depth of 12–15". Mix in a generous, 2–4" layer of dehydrated manure, garden compost and Breck's® Food for Bulbs and Perennials. If your soil is already a rich garden loam and well-drained, the addition of Breck's Food for Bulbs and Perennials will provide the ideal conditions recommended by Breck's Dutch bulb experts for superior growth and blooming. If you have clay soil, which is a heavy soil, you may need to amend for drainage. A good solution is to mix compost, sand and rock dust or crushed stone into your soil. If you have sandy soil, amend with compost and possibly clay to increase the retention of nutrients. This will also help retain moisture.

Planting

Make a hole that's about 6–8" deep. Place the tuber with the old flower stalk facing up (see image to the left) and cover with 2" of soil. Firm the soil and water thoroughly.

Mulching

A thin layer (1–2") of mulch (compost or a commercial type of mulch) has a positive effect on your dahlias by retaining moisture, maintaining a more even soil temperature, providing organic matter for an optimal soil structure and reducing weed growth. It also prevents soil from splashing onto the flowers and foliage.

Fertilizing

A surface application of Breck's® Food for Bulbs and Perennials at planting time is recommended. In poor soils, plants may benefit from a second application in early to midsummer. If natural rainfall is less than 1" per week, additional watering is recommended.

Pinching

Though dahlias will grow just fine on their own, pinching will give you a stronger, bushier plant with more flowers. The best time to pinch a dahlia is when it's between 12–16" tall and has at least four sets of leaves on the centre stalk. Locate the upper-most sprout on the main stem and remove it with your fingers or a pair of scissors. Take care not to damage the stem or nearby leaves.

If you want the largest flowers possible, you should not pinch. For this purpose, remove auxiliary shoots. This allows the main flower to blossom to its fullest potential. Just pull out the buds that are growing next to the main flower.

Staking

Tall dahlias may require staking, especially in windy areas. At planting time, insert a means of support, like flower support rings.

Deadheading

We suggest removing spent flowers on a regular basis, for instance, once a week. Deadheading encourages your dahlias to put their energies into producing more flowers, thereby promoting an extended display of form and colour in the garden.

Cut flowers



Dahlias make excellent cut flowers. The ones best suited have a vase life of 7–10 days. Pick flowers that are nearly or fully open because the buds will not open once they're cut in most cases. On warm days, harvest early in the morning or late in the afternoon. Strip off all leaves that would be below the water line in your vase. Nutrients for cut flowers (floral preservatives) stimulate the flowers to open, extend the vase life and keep the water in the vase clean.

In pots

For best results, use a container that has a diameter of at least 12" with drainage holes at the bottom. Use a good potting loam (also called potting soil or mix). Fill the container and place the tuber(s). Cover with about 1½" of soil, and water well. Pinching helps to get a bushier, sturdier plant with more flowers. Pinching is best done when the plants have formed at least four sets of leaves. Pinch out the growth tip of the stalk.

Diseases and pests

Slugs and snails

Bait two weeks after planting and continue to bait throughout the season. A few organically friendly methods that work for us:

1. Coffee grounds spread around the plants
2. A beer trap. A container such as a glass jar or large yogurt pot sunk into the ground so the rim is at or just above soil level, filled with beer acts as a slug trap
3. Organic slug pellets. Approved for use in organic gardening and completely non-toxic to other animals.

Mites/Thrips

Spider mites can be controlled using horticultural oil. The best way to avoid thrips is to remove weeds and grass from around garden areas to eliminate alternate hosts.

Earwigs

These pests can eat dahlia petals, although they do not hurt the plant itself. Spray with insecticidal soap if damage is a real problem.

Aphid

Spray your dahlias with a garden hose, being sure to get the undersides of the leaves.

Deer

While dahlias are not “deer proof,” they are low on the deer’s list of favourite foods. In some parts of the country, they are considered deer resistant—probably in those areas where the animals find enough other plants they prefer to eat.

Powdery Mildew

This condition commonly shows up in the fall. To prevent it, spray with $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon baking soda mixed with 1 quart of water from late July to

August. Spraying plants weekly at the first signs of infection can protect plants against further damage.

Winter care



When frost blackens the foliage in fall, cut your dahlias back to the ground immediately. Then carefully lift each clump of tubers. Put the clumps in a container filled with perlite or brown peat. Space the tubers so that none are touching. Store the containers off the floor in an area with temperatures of 40–45°F (4–7°C). Replant in the spring as directed, when danger of frost has passed.