

DAHLIAS and what to do, when you get them.

The tubers should be planted around March up at a depth of 2-3 in. in pots and the soil should be slightly damp, but not wet. Place them in good light and spray them occasionally with water to encourage the buds to form well. A temperature of around 60 degrees F is ideal to encourage them into growth.

Dahlias should not be planted out into the soil until all danger of frost has passed. Do not plant out if the soil is very wet, but wait until a dry spell is forecast.

Dig and prepare a 12 inch diameter and 12 inch deep hole. Mix a shovel full of compost, a handful of bone meal and a little ground limestone to the soil which has been removed. Fill the planting hole with the soil mixture until it is 6 inches deep, then place the tuber horizontally in the bottom of the hole with the eye pointing upwards. Tall varieties need staking, so this is a good time to put a stake in, taking care not to damage the tubers, at this stage it is good to name the variety. Cover the tubers with about 2 inches of the mixture and water thoroughly. When the sprout begins to emerge from the soil, gradually add more mixture until the hole is entirely filled.

Once the plant reaches enough height, it will need to be tied to the stake, tights do the job very well as they will expand with the plant rather than cutting into it. Continue to tie in as the plant grows.

A dahlia in bloom is a very heavy feeder, so you may like to give it a feed just before it begins to bloom.

Dahlias need plenty of water, once a week is good, but more if it is very hot, also water deeply.

To promote a compact, bushy growing habit, with more flowers, pinch back the new growth when your dahlia is about a foot high. If your goal is to produce massive blooms, remove all of the side buds at the end of each branch throughout the growing season.

Slugs love the new growth of dahlias, so protect them in whichever way you prefer. (I would recommend "Slug gone".)