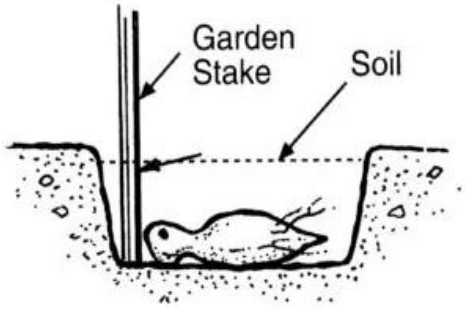
WSU EXTENSION
Thurston County

GROWING DAHLIAS

When to plant: Dahlias can be planted outdoors once the soil has warmed and all danger of frost has passed. In the south sound area, this is generally around Mother's Day. It is better to plant when the soil is a bit dry than when it is wet. Dahlia tubers can also be started earlier in pots in a greenhouse or indoors and then planted outside when the soil is warm, dry and the frost danger has passed.

Location: Dahlias prefer well-drained, neutral soil in an area that gets about 6-8 hours of direct sunlight.

How to plant: Dig a hole 4 – 6 inches deep. Place the tuber flat in the hole on its side with the growth bud (eye) pointing upward. For varieties that will be more than two feet tall, pound in a stake a few inches away from the tuber eye. Cover the tuber with soil. If your soil is heavy, you may need to plant shallower or add soil back over time.



Soil: Soil conditioners like compost or other soil amendments can be turned into the soil before planting.

Fertilizer: Broadcast 10-20-20 over the dahlia bed about two weeks before planting and spade it in. Alternatively, you can add the fertilizer and mix it into the soil as you plant. When the plants are about six inches tall, a higher nitrogen fertilizer can be added. Later in the season, when flowers are beginning to bloom, use fertilizer that is low in nitrogen and high in phosphorus and potash.

Watering: Don't water until you see the tuber sprouting above the soil. Because tubers are susceptible to rotting in wet soil, be careful not to saturate the soil. As with most plants, watering deeply less often is better than watering lightly more often.

Pinching: To encourage compact, bushy plants with more flowers, pinch out the center growing tip when the plant is about 12 inches tall.

Disbudding: For bigger blooms, remove the two side buds next to the next to the central bloom.

Deadheading: Cut off dead blooms to encourage the plant to continue blooming. If you want to try to grow some dahlias from seeds, save and dry a few of the dead blooms. Seeds will be new types of dahlias – some are beautiful, some not so much! In the spring, start the seeds in pots, and later transplant them into your garden. If you get a flower you like, mark the plant and dig up the tuber in the fall.

Pest Control: Dahlias can be damaged by slugs in the spring, and aphids just about anytime. Control slugs by hand-picking and disposing of them, or use slug bait. Aphids can be sprayed with a strong stream of cold water. The best resource for pest control is WSU's Hortsense. See below for website address.

Cutting flowers: Best to cut early in the morning or late in the evening, especially if it is a hot day. Display the flowers in a cool area of your home and change the water at least every other day.

Digging tubers: Cut the dahlia stalk down to about 6 inches and carefully lift the tuber out by digging around the entire plant. Hose the dirt off the clump and let it dry before dividing and storing.

Dividing tubers: Carefully cut the tubers apart with sharp pruners. Each tuber must have an "eye", which is located around the crown of the plant. A tuber with no eye will not grow. If you are not sure if there is an eye, you can save it and check again in the spring before planting.

Storing tubers: Store in a cool storage area that is not subject to freezing. Shavings or similar medium can be used to keep the tubers separated. Check a couple times through the winter and discard any that are rotting. If they seem shriveled, spray a small amount of water on them.

RESOURCES:

The American Dahlia Society http://www.dahlia.org
WSU Hortsense: www.hortsense.cahnrs.wsu.edu

General Gardening Questions and Info

Email - master@co.thurston.wa.us
Website - https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/

WSU Master Gardener Program Questions-

Cori Carlton, Program Manager
WSU Master Gardener and Master Recycler Composter Programs
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