devine dahlias

It is not uncommon for new dahlia growers to experience a high rate of tuber loss for a variety of reasons. Our biggest challenge initially was preventing tuber rot.

We are in Zone 7, where the average minimum temperate ranges from 0-10 F and last frost date traditionally is between March 22 – April 03.

Because there is so much variability in regions across the US where dahlias are grown, it is important to check with local gardening resources or local dahlia societies to find out what works best in your area.

**What has worked well for us:**

- Plant after the last frost, and after the ground soil warms up to 60*F. This often means we plant at the end of May.
- We wake up our tubers in a warm, humid environment 4-6 weeks before planting. We plant horizontally with the eye/new sprout facing up.
- We do not water at planting time. We begin watering only after the plant emerges from the ground and is a few inches tall.
- Before planting, we amend our clay soil with peat moss, sand, and aged compost to help with water drainage. At the time of planting, we supplement with bone meal.
- We plant each tuber 18-24” apart and rows are separated by a 4’ path.
- Each planting row is anchored with two 6’ metal posts between which we stretch plant support netting. Additional posts are utilized mid-row as needed to support larger plants.

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- Plants grow very tall and require support to keep them upright, particularly from strong winds or occasionally rainstorms. We have had the best luck with two layers of plant netting spaced approximately 12” and 40” from the ground.
- We pinch the top portion of the plant when they have 3-4 sets of leaves. This encourages a healthier, bushier plant with more blooms.
- When the plants are established, we use a low nitrogen fertilizer. We cut all blooms about 18” deep and deadhead all spent blooms to encourage tuber production.
- For days with intense summer heat, we provide plants with shade and mist with water throughout the day.
- After the first frost, we cut the flower stalks and allow the tubers to remain in the ground for a few weeks to prepare them for winter storage.

Every dahlia variety is different. Some bloom early, some bloom later in the season. Some dahlias are prolific bloomers while others may only produce one or two blooms per season. The same is true for tuber production. If your plant appears to grow well but stalls out after 1-2 feet, the tuber likely rotted. If this happens, consider adjusting exposure to water (protect from rain or reduce watering) or amending the soil for better drainage. This was a common problem we had when growing in pots. Once we switched to planning in the ground, our success rate increased significantly. If using containers for growing is your only option, consider using a dahlia variety better suited for container gardening.

HAPPY GROWING!

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