

Marketa Koncinska



F ILOLI

GARDENER'S REFERENCE

Shortly after the introduction of species dahlias from Mexico to Europe and the United States, thousands of new hybrids were developed; dahlias were wildly popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when it was en vogue for estate gardeners to grow and enter their blooms in horticultural competitions. Mrs. Roth

planted dahlias at Filoli for use as cut flowers, and one of her favorites was the red dinner-plate dahlia, 'Mrs. George le Boutillier' (pictured at left). Today, Filoli strives to follow that tradition, and to maintain striking displays of this important period plant; in late summer and early fall, when annuals are being pulled and replanted, and leaves are turning color, our beds of Dahlias are in full splendor. Passing visitors are full of exclamations at the beauty of the flowers, and curious to know just how we get such full, tall plants and continuous blooms.

DAHLIA CARE

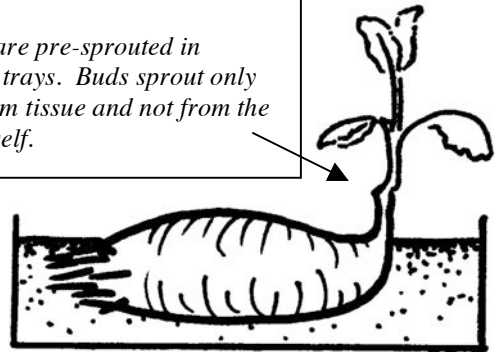
Greenhouse staff pre-sprouts all dahlias in the greenhouses, beginning in mid-February. To do so, the tuberous roots are half buried in damp potting soil, in long, shallow containers (milk cartons cut lengthwise work well). In late spring, after tulip displays are removed and the soil is warmed by the spring sunshine, dahlias are planted where they will receive full sun: at the balustrade above the sunken garden, south of the Chartres in the walled garden, and adjacent to the cutting cages.

Planting

- Sink sturdy 1"x 1"x 6' tall stakes 2 feet into the ground. Stakes should be at least 2 feet apart.
- Dig holes around these centers, 10" deep and 2 feet wide.
- Rub out weak sprouts, leaving one strong sprout.
- Place tuber in the base of the hole with its sprouting eye 2" from its stake.

- Backfill, covering the tuber 2-3" deep with a mix of organic compost and complete fertilizer, such as 5-10-10. Filoli uses a mix of composted horse manure from local stables, and a complete fertilizer.
- Water deeply.
- Fill holes with soil as sprouts grow. This ensures that the soil around the dahlia stays warm. Continue filling until a substantial water basin remains, to allow for deep, weekly watering. Our dahlias typically need water two times per week for 30 minutes to one hour, depending on the season. A soaker hose, drip, or bubbler are all appropriate tools for watering dahlias.

Fig. 1
Tubers are pre-sprouted in shallow trays. Buds sprout only from stem tissue and not from the tuber itself.



JAN	DIVIDE
FEB	SPROUT TUBERS
MAR	
APR	
MAY	PLANT
JUN	
JUL	
AUG	
SEP	MAINTAIN
OCT	
NOV	DIG AND HEEL IN
DEC	

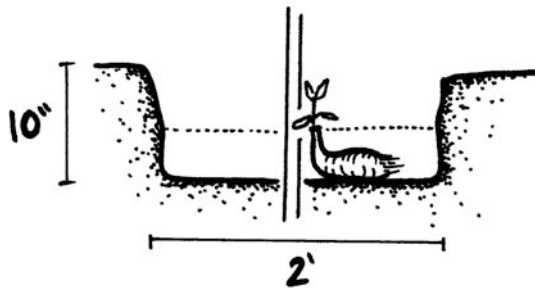


Fig. 2 and 3: Above: Newly planted dahlia tuber with soil level in a partially filled planting hole. Right: Newly planted dahlias in the walled garden.



- Remove lower leaves of new dahlias as they grow, and train the stem up the stake with ties to protect from winds.
- Once the hole is sufficiently backfilled and the new dahlia has 3-4 sets of leaves, pinch back the tip to encourage branching.

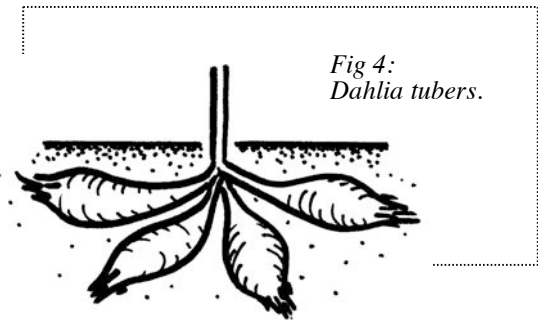
Maintenance

Proper maintenance encourages abundant, long-lasting blooms.

- Fertilize dahlias lightly every two to three weeks with liquid feed.
- 'Dead-head' by removing flowers that are fully open, browning, or dropping petals. This will keep the plant tidy, and prevent the plant from allocating extra energy and nutrients to spent blooms.
- Tie to stakes for support as needed.
- To grow large blooms, remove axial (side) flower buds, leaving one terminal bud per stem. This encourages thicker stems and healthier blooms.
- To provide a more abundant supply of smaller blooms for cut flowers, we remove fewer buds or do not disbud.

Storage

In October and November, or after a few hard frosts to set the plants into dormancy, the dahlias are cut back to several inch stems and two people work together to gently fork the tubers out of their holes. They are then 'heeled in' a pile of fine mulch for the winter to protect them from frost damage, until greenhouse staff can divide them for use the next season. The growing plants produce a cluster of tuberous roots, each of which is divided off with a chunk of stem; the stem has latent buds that will resume the next season's growth.



References / Further Reading:

- Barker, M. (1993). Growing Dahlias. *The Sundial Times*, 1, 1.
- Tolmach, L. (2002). Dahlia Mania & the Search for 'Mrs. George le Boutillier'. *The Sundial Times*, 29, 1.

Filoli Gardener's Reference sheets are created by garden staff to answer common questions regarding Filoli's traditional horticultural practices. This sheet may be accessed from the Filoli website.

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