

Dahlia

Soil: Rich, moist soil

Light: Full sun or part shade

Planting Depth: 4 inches

Planting Distance: 18 inches

Dabble in dahlias if you want sure-fire color from midsummer to frost. Types vary from the dwarfs used for edging through larger single, anemone, peony, cactus, water lily, colarette, ball, and pompon types. Some are sturdy six-footers. They even make good temporary hedges if you stick to one variety.

Comments

Buy tubers to start larger dahlias. Set a 1 x 2 stake next to each at planting time. If you wait, you may damage roots. Set tuber with the crown, from which roots grow, by the stake. Cover tuber with only an inch of soil. Fill in later as shoot grows. Make a shallow basin around the plant to catch water. Use a low-nitrogen fertilizer formulated for bulbs. Mulch to keep roots cool and the ground moist and free of weeds.

In the fall after a light frost, cut plants back to six-inch stems. Dig tubers carefully, hose off dirt, and cut away any broken roots. Let the tubers dry in the shade for a week before storing them. Place the tubers (they'll still be somewhat moist) in ordinary cartons with dry sawdust, vermiculite, or sphagnum moss. Label each clump. Store at 35 to 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Add more sawdust if roots start to shrivel.

Wait until spring to divide; each dahlia tuber will need at least one bud or "eye."