KPOV – *The Point*

Gardening: Get Good at It

“Dazzling Dahlias”

April 6, 2021

Did you know that we can grow dahlias in Central Oregon?

With a little care, dahlias will provide a continuous display of blooms from July until the first hard frost.

The majority of dahlias are tubers, which multiply while they grow, producing additional plants every year.

The best part about dahlias is they love to be cut. Cutting the flowers stimulates more flowering, so blooms should be cut as often as possible, preferably in the early morning before they start to wilt, or in the evening when they have recovered from the hot sun.

Of course, here in Central Oregon, a little special care is needed.

## Short Bloom Time

First, choose dahlias with a short bloom time. The earlier the bloom, the longer the display.

## Planting

The soil needs to be loose and needs enough organic material to hold water. Peat moss or coconut coir is an ideal amendment.

Native to Mexico, Dahlias love full sun, preferably six to eight hours of sun per day.

Plant when the soil is 60 degrees, and no earlier than May 1st. Plant each tuber 12 to 24 inches apart, with the eye facing up. For each plant, dig a six-inch hole and mix in a handful of bone meal for nutrients. Dahlias, which can grow to over five feet high, need staking, so it’s easiest to place a stake next to each tuber when it is planted. ~~Staking at planting time~~ prevents damage to the roots.

The dahlias should sprout in three to five weeks after planting.

Don’t mulch until the plants sprout, and then don’t mulch within six inches of the plant.

## Care

Deep-water as needed, every two or three days depending on how hot the summer is. Keep the soil moist, but not soggy or the tubers will rot.

Weed by hand, being careful not to disturb the tubers.

When the third set of leaves appear, it’s time to prune, by pinching off the top.

Thirty days after planting, fertilize with 5-10-10 or 0-20-20 fertilizer.

Fertilize once more three or four weeks later. That’s all the fertilizer required.

Watch for bugs and diseases and treat as needed. Earwigs love dahlias, but also watch for spider mites and mildew.

~~Protect the dahlias from frost:~~ cover with row cover or sheets or plastic if frost is forecast. The plants will turn black and die back when hit with a frost. If they do get frost damage in mid-summer, cut off the black stems and leaves and they may recover.

## Winter Storage

We all have to put our gardens to bed in the Fall. ~~Here is where~~ dahlias require extra attention in Central Oregon.

Dahlias must be dug up and stored at the end of the season or they will rot in the ground. The first frost in September or October means it’s time to dig them up, preferably within two weeks after the frost.

First, cut back the stems to about six inches, then carefully lift the dahlias out of the ground, trying not to break the tubers. The tubers will probably have grown into clumps. If multiple colors were planted, this is a good time to tag them or group them by color ~~so you will know which is which in the spring.~~

Hose off the tubers and let them dry.

~~After completely dry,~~ pack them for the winter, layering them in sawdust, or peat moss, or wood shavings. Ideal storage bins are cardboard boxes from Amazon or Costco.

Store the boxed tubers at 40 to 50 degrees; a garage is ideal.

## Spring: Divide and Plant

In May, unpack the tubers and discard any that have dried out or rotted. This is the time to divide the tubers, slicing them so that each piece has an eye… ready to sprout for next summer’s bloom.

For more information about Dahlias, OSU will have an online class on April 13th. Go to our website: [gocomga.com](http://gocomga.com) and click on OSU Extension on the orange bar.  Look for "Dazzling Dahlias" in the list. While you’re on our website, don’t forget to sign up for COMGA’s Spring Seminar Series. The list of online classes and registration is on the Gardening News page. This has been Gardening: Get Good at It on KPOV’s The Point.

## Resources:

“Dahlia Culture” by Ray A. McNeilan. <https://catalog.extension.oregonstate.edu/fs95>

“Dalliance With Dahlias Leads to 34-Year Love Affair” by Kym Pokorny. <https://today.oregonstate.edu/news/dalliance-dahlias-leads-34-year-love-affair>