

Dahlias

Natives of Mexico and first introduced into Europe in the 1600's, Dahlias have been so extensively hybridised that there is now a form and plant height suitable for every area of the garden.

Primarily classified by the flower shape, the most common types are the cactus dahlia, with a spiky appearance and decorative dahlias which include a range of forms from tight ball-shaped flowers through to more open forms called water lily dahlias. As well as these two, other common types include dwarf forms ideal for borders or potting, and single flowered forms which are widely used for landscaping.



*Cactus Dahlia
Friquolet*



*Decorative Dahlia
Foxy Lady*



*Water Lily Dahlia
Keith Hammett*



*Single Dahlia
Bishop of Auckland*

Dahlias are frost tender and should not be planted out until all danger of frost has passed. They prefer a full sun location, but will tolerate some shade. Drainage is

very important as the tubers do not like being saturated for any length of time. In high rainfall or wet areas they can easily be grown by using slightly raised beds to ensure rapid drainage.

Plant the tubers with the crown just below the surface of the soil and water in. Little attention is required during growing other than to spray occasionally for thrips in hot conditions and with a fungicide in humid conditions as the foliage and flowers may be damaged otherwise.



Removing old flower heads will encourage further flowering, and will also prevent the plant from wasting energy with seed production.

Dahlia plants go through different stages of growth depending on the day length. During long day length in mid summer the plants produce a lot of top growth and flowers. Decreasing day length in autumn triggers the plants into tuber production below the ground, ready for dormancy during winter.

Because our winters are relatively wet, tubers can be lost to rot if left in the ground over winter. It is best to dig them up each year in late autumn after the first frosts have knocked the leaves back. Lift them carefully and split any large clumps up into smaller ones. Be sure to keep some of the crown as a part of each section when splitting the clumps – it is from the crown that the new shoots develop in spring, and without a part of that a section may be blind, with no growing point. Rinse the tubers off to clean them and after drying, store them in a cool, airy place until replanting in spring.

The flowers can be picked for indoor use but will not continue to open off the plant, so should be picked only when they are open already.