

Cornell Cooperative Extension

Capital Area Agriculture and Horticulture Program

Winter Storage for Dahlia Tubers

As the cut flower season comes to a close, your thoughts turn toward the root cellar. Dahlias are one of the most popular cut flowers. It's worth storing tubers properly for next season. In our northern climate, dahlia tubers will rot in the ground if they aren't dug up at the end of the season.

Without the appropriate temperature and humidity conditions in your storage location, tubers can rot or dry out in a basement or root cellar. Before the first frost, write down which cultivars did well for you this year. Remove plants that are infected by a virus (Image 1).

How to store healthy dahlia tubers:

1. Label the base of healthy plants that you will overwinter with variety and growing notes.
2. Continue cutting flowers from plants until the first frost, when the vegetative part of the plants dies.
3. After the first frost, cut off the top vegetation from the roots. Leave 4-6 inches of stem sticking out of the ground.
4. Leave tubers in the ground for another few weeks. This triggers tuber "eyes" to develop, allowing for high quality spring growth.
5. Dig up the tubers using a pitch fork. Take care not to damage the tubers by digging a ring 6-8 inches around the stalk to get started.
6. After digging, spread the tubers out.
7. At this point, some growers wash the soil off of tubers before storage while others do not. An argument can be made either way.
8. Pack tubers into crates or boxes that contain either peat moss, wood chips, shredded newspaper, or a combination of two.
9. Store in an unheated area that DOES NOT freeze. The ideal storage temperature is 40F.
10. Some varieties, such as Café au Lait, tend to dry out. Tuber storage, similar to root vegetable storage, is a balance between temperature and humidity.



Image 1. Healthy dahlia on the left. Virus infected plant on the right with mottled leaves and stunted shoots. There are dozens of dahlia viruses. Do not overwinter tubers from infected plants.

This factsheet was prepared by former Extension Educator, Lily Calderwood.

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