

Dahlias – The Weed of Mexico

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Many believe our garden dahlia to have originated in Europe. We know that thanks to Hernando Cortes, elaborate Aztec gardens were pilfered by Spanish conquerors during the Inquisition, and sent to Spain for plant breeding by European plantsmen. It was not until the late 18th Century that today's dahlia was given its Latin name, after Andreas Dahl, a Swedish botanist.



Those of us fond of the dahlia are familiar with their sensitivity to cold, and go to great lengths to procure and protect our precious tubers for the next growth season.

I am happy to report that the next growth season is upon us. When dividing a dahlia from an existing tuber, ensure that each root contains one live bud and two sets of leaves. If starting indoors, use a well-drained medium containing peat and vermiculite.

After frost, prepare your garden bed by spading down to 8 to 10 inches. Apply manure or compost for slow release of nitrogen, or a 5-10-15 or 5-10-10 fertilizer. Dahlias also utilize large amounts of potash for root development; so add extra potassium if your soil test indicates low levels are present.



If planting the large flowering dahlias, plan on supporting them. When your plants are at about 12 inches tall, drive a stake next to them, tying the stake tightly but the stem loosely.



Dahlias require water. Keep your soil moist, but not soaked, as tubers can become damaged when moisture excludes air from the soil.

For arrangements, cut blossoms when fully opened. Floral preservatives or frequent water changes help extend floral life.

Sources:

www.extension.umn.edu/garden/yard-garden/flowers/growing-dahlias/

<http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/1970-30-4-the-dahlia-an-early-history.pdf>

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