

DAHLIA TUBER CARE

Digging / Dividing / Winter Storage

For cold-winter climates like Michigan: protect dahlias from freezing, label varieties carefully, and store healthy tubers in cool, stable conditions.

01 WHEN & HOW TO DIG

Label before frost. Identify each dahlia while blooms and foliage are recognizable. Flagging tape and a Sharpie or sturdy garden markers work best.

Wait for frost. After frost blackens foliage, clumps may stay in the ground until you can dig. Dig before the ground freezes.

Cut stems. Trim to about 4-6 inches. Avoid leaving hollow stems exposed to rain for long periods.

Lift gently. Loosen soil in a wide circle, about 12-18 inches from the stalk. Lift carefully; never pull by the stem.

Clean & dry. Brush or gently wash off soil. Divide immediately if desired; pre-drying is not required. Or air-dry in shade with airflow for up to 3 days.

Never dry on concrete. Bare tubers and clumps may lose moisture and shrivel. Dry on cardboard, wood, or a raised rack instead.

02 DIVIDING THE CLUMP

Fall or spring? Both work. Fall clumps can be easier to cut; spring eyes may be easier to see.

Find the eye. Each viable division needs an eye on crown tissue, an intact neck, and a firm tuber.

Cut carefully. Use sharp pruners or a knife. Leave crown on every division; discard rotten or broken-neck tubers.

Sanitize tools. Disinfect snips or cutting tools between clumps to reduce disease spread.

Check for gall. Inspect clumps for crown gall or leafy gall (swollen growths or crowded shoots). If suspected, trash the entire clump, not compost. Avoid planting dahlias there for several years. Also sanitize your pitchfork, shovel, or other digging tools that touched the suspect clump before digging other plants.

Dry cut surfaces. Let freshly cut surfaces dry and seal over before storing, typically 12-24 hours, with good airflow.

Label once dry. Write the variety on each dry tuber with a Sharpie before packing, unless each variety has its own labeled container.

THE MOST IMPORTANT RULE

A tuber needs an eye on a piece of crown, an intact neck and a healthy body to grow a new plant.

03 PACK FOR WINTER

Keep them cool. Aim for about 40-45°F, dark and above freezing. Avoid wide temperature swings.

Choose packing. Use coarse vermiculite, coconut coir or clean wood shavings; avoid overly wet or dry conditions.

Avoid trapped moisture. Do not seal visibly wet tubers in airtight packaging; allow suitable air exchange.

QUICK REMINDER Label before frost. Dig before soil freezes. Disinfect snips between clumps and digging tools after contact with suspect gall. Dry cuts before packing.

References: American Dahlia Society; Oregon State University Extension.

04 CHECK THROUGH WINTER

Inspect monthly. Look for condensation, mold, soft spots and excessive shriveling.

Too wet? Remove rotting tubers, replace wet packing and increase ventilation if needed.

Too dry? Slightly adjust packing moisture rather than soaking tubers.

In spring. Move to a somewhat warmer spot to encourage eyes; divide whole clumps if needed.