

ADS Dahlia University - Cuttings

Dahlia growers take cuttings for various reasons. Some maniacal exhibitors believe dahlias grown from cuttings produce better, easier-to-time blooms. In fact, most serious dahlia exhibitors in England grow dahlias only from cuttings; they don't plant tubers out in their garden. And who can argue that getting several cuttings from an expensive tuber isn't a great idea? With new varieties often costing \$20 or more, it just makes sense to take some cuttings to increase your stock.

Dahlias grown from cuttings produce a plant that is the same as one grown from a tuber. They will bloom the same as one grown from a tuber and when dug in the fall, they will reward the grower with a clump of tubers.

In the northwest (where tuber planting would be about May 1), most growers put tubers from which they wish to take cuttings "on the bench" about February 1. Most growers use the standard 11-inch by 21-inch trays; each tray can hold up to 25 tubers. Standard practice is to plant them in the trays with the eyes exposed above the soil. Use a high-quality soilless mix.

The trays can be placed on a bench in a greenhouse or in a garage or basement under 15 hours of florescent light per day. Shelves purchased from "big box stores" work great. Many growers add bottom heat, although there is some evidence that indicates the heat may not significantly enhance growth. But it's important to maintain humidity, so cover the trays with domes (see image) at left and mist at least twice a day; more often if possible. Remove the dome during the day; constant covering could encourage damping off.



You will soon see the sprouts begin to grow. When about 3 inches tall, slice the cuttings with an xacto (or similar) knife. Place them in the same soilless mix you have been using and water them well. Be sure to mist the new cuttings liberally. There is no need to use a rooting hormone. You can use it if it will make you feel better, but there is no evidence that it enhances rooting of dahlia cuttings.

To conserve space, your author roots four cuttings per 4-inch pot, transplanting them into individual pots after they root, or you can use trays of oasis plugs (made for this purpose, approximately one inch square) and repot when the plug is full of roots.

The plant here is a six-week-old cutting of Kelsey Dwarf. A stint in a cold frame to harden the plants before planting them out in the garden is a good idea.

Soon after you take a cutting, you will notice more sprouts starting to grow. That's exactly the point: tubers will continue to produce additional cuttings. In fact, ten cuttings from one tuber would not be unusual. The later cuttings may be skinnier, which is a good thing. The later, skinnier cuttings root much faster. The early fat cuttings are much slower to root, and some never do. Your author prefers cuttings taken between March 15 and April 15 (in the northwest).



Like many plants, dahlias can be infected with several viruses. The viruses are spread from plant to plant by a vector, typically an insect. If the bug feasts on an infected plant and then moves to a healthy plant, it can spread virus. **Beware: your xacto knife is a vector.** If you have a tuber on the bench that has a virus, you can spread it to your healthy stock. So *always* dip your knife in a solution of 50% household bleach and 50% water to sterilize it.

In the northwest most dahlia growers plant their tubers about May 1. Cuttings can be safely planted about May 15 using your tomato-planting technique. Remove the bottom one or two pairs of leaves and place

those nodes below the soil surface, ensure the plant is in a little dip or saucer to retain water, and use a wilt preventing product.

Please note: Adjust all dates based on the tuber planting time in your location, which will be after there is no chance of frost.

Our courses are written by dahlia enthusiasts, not necessarily scientists or horticulturalists. These enthusiasts are pleased to share their experience and best practices with you. Please keep in mind that there are a variety of opinions in the dahlia community and that different solutions and procedures work in different circumstances and locales. We urge you to participate in a [local society](#) where you will meet great growers with knowledge of growing dahlias in your area...and you'll have fun!

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