

ADS Dahlia University - Watering

Dahlias produce large plants and therefore need a fair amount of water. Ideally you will keep your soil evenly moist, never let it be soggy, and never let it dry out. Your soil and climate conditions will impact your ability to do this. If your soil is sandy, expect to water often. If you have clay soil, do everything you can to improve drainage and then water carefully.

Here are some guidelines:

- If you expect dry conditions, mulch to preserve soil moisture. Don't let the mulch touch the plant's stalk.
- Do not over water – dahlias do not like wet feet. This is especially important when the tuber is planted but the plant is not up yet. Tubers are very susceptible to rot at this point.
- On very warm sunny days, when the soil temperature exceeds 95 F, water to cool the plant and soil. This avoids plant stress which inhibits growing. Soil temperatures over 95 F can be lethal to plant roots. As long as the plants are not blooming you might want to water the foliage also.
- Read the plants health regularly. Your plants will tell you what they need. When plants are droopy, they are being stressed for some reason...often lack of water. (Some droop in hot midday sun is normal). If water seems necessary, then water slowly so the water will sink deeply into the soil. Loose soil texture helps the water to sink easily and allows air to reach the roots.
- Most dahlia growers advise watering near the roots. If you must water the foliage do your watering early in the day. Particularly, avoid overhead watering/sprinkling when blooms are open. This avoids bloom spot and stem bending or breaking which is caused when the flowers hold water, become very heavy, and bend or break their stem. If your watering method does include watering the foliage, water early in the day. (See exception above for very hot days.)

Some comments on mechanical watering systems

Sprinklers are inexpensive but they provide uneven watering, may damage plants because of the pressure, and waste water due to evaporation and watering a broad area all of which may not need water.

Soaker/drip hoses are old standbys. They efficiently water just the roots, however they do not usually water evenly. Pressure diminishes as the water gets farther down the hose, so plants farther out don't get as much water.

Drip lines put water where you want it and are easy to use once they are set up.

Drip tapes are a newer option. They put water where you want it and are designed to disperse the water evenly throughout the length of the tape.

The quality of watering systems varies considerably. Do your homework. It's easy to get customer opinions/feedback on the internet. Buy the best solution you can afford.

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!