



WHAT TO DO WITH YOUR DAHLIA TUBERS

You've got excited by the sight of the dahlias at our early show and ventured along to the Late Chrysanthemum Show and Tuber Sale in November. You were tempted by the amazing bargains on offer and now have a box of tubers! But what do you do with them?

Here is a simple 5-point plan for storing them:

- First, don't be tempted to plant them in the ground! You will need to wait until next year to do that.
- Second, check that the tubers you've bought are completely dry. We try to deliver them to the sale in the best condition we can, but the weather isn't always kind to us. So, if they still look damp, finish drying them for a week or two before storing them. Upside down in, say, a greenhouse with plenty of air is ideal (taking care to not let frost get to them).
- Third, choose a storage place to overwinter them. We want to store tubers dry, dark and in a frost-free place. A cool place is best as we don't want them to start shooting until the spring. A timber or brick shed, or a workshop or garage that doesn't get frosty is ideal. People do store them under greenhouse benches, but it depends on how cold your greenhouse gets! A centrally heated house would likely be too warm and dry (but a loft might be suitable). Too damp and they will start to rot or get mould, too dry and they will tend to desiccate.
- Fourth, choose a container to store them in. Some people like to store them in dry compost (or something similar, e.g. perlite) in a tray or box. Others use newspaper. Others store them without any packing around them at all. We can use a variety of boxes, crates or large trays. Avoid a sealed plastic crate unless you know your tubers are completely dry.
- Fifth, check them from time to time and remove any that show signs of disease. As with storing other tubers/corms, it is possible that some might harbour disease – so if you can keep them separate or not too tightly packed you won't spread disease from one tuber to another.





Hopefully, your tubers will survive the winter. But don't be upset if not all of them make it. Even experienced growers find that not all of their tubers survive. So, assuming you managed to get most of them through the winter, you are keen to plant them. Don't be tempted to plant them too early. It depends on where you live, but we still get frosts in May, so any green leaves above ground before then are likely to get damaged by frost. It is probably best to wait until at least the end of April (or better early May) to plant – so that shoots emerge from the ground after the risk of frost has gone. You can always put them in large pots with compost (in a conservatory or greenhouse) to get a head start and then move outside once the risk of frost has gone.

One question we often get asked is whether you can divide the tubers to increase the number of plants? Yes, you can. Some people do it in the autumn and store the separate pieces. But we suggest you do this in the spring – when you start to see signs of eyes appearing where shoots will be. You will be better able to see what you are doing and introducing disease is less of a risk. At this stage, you can divide a large clump with something like an old breadknife so that you have a viable tuber and eye on each piece¹. Often the tubers we sell are grown from cuttings and are only one year old. While this produces a viable tuber, it may not be large enough to split in the first year.

An alternative way to increase the number of plants is to take cuttings. Unless you want to grow a lot of dahlias don't be tempted into thinking you need to start taking cuttings in February or March – just because you see it on YouTube! If you only need a few extra plants, you'll find it much easier to do in late March, or in April & May. But that's a whole subject for another time!

We often get asked if you can leave tubers in the ground at the end of the year? The simple answer is yes. But there is always a risk that the wet and cold will get to them. Increase the chance of them surviving by removing the top foliage when the frosts come, and putting a mulch over them to protect them from both the cold and wet. Otherwise, it is a case of lifting, drying and storing as we describe above.

Good luck!

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¹ Some people divide clumps into individual tubers with eyes – sometimes referred to as 'chicken legs'. People often store these by wrapping in clingfilm. Youtube videos are available should you wish to try this.