



HOW TO TAKE DAHLIA CUTTINGS

You've successfully stored your dahlia tubers over the winter and now want to take cuttings to increase the number of plants you have of each variety. But how do you take cuttings in the spring?

Starting again for the new season: tubers are placed on compost in a tray. The tubers then have compost put around them, so that the crown is not completely covered. This will lessen the chances of the crown rotting.



Tubers are then set up on a bench in the greenhouse or shed. Some people start them as early (Jan/Feb) with bottom heat. Other growers start a little later (from March/April on), when the weather is warmer and when they start shooting naturally, and less/no bottom heat is required. Do continue to check for disease, which should be removed!

A few weeks later, dahlia tubers will start to produce cutting material. Cuttings can be taken with a sharp blade. Note that the first batch of cuttings often contains large hollow shoots which are more difficult to root. Some people discard these and wait for the second batch to develop before taking cuttings.



There are many different techniques for taking successful cuttings. Some people take a bit of the 'growing eye' (part of the woody crown material) with the cutting, but that means the tuber is less likely to shoot again from that spot (it depends on how low the cut is). Taking the cutting a little higher

(in the green) will mean that further shoots will emerge for later cuttings. Cuttings from most plants (including dahlias) need to be trimmed just below a leaf joint, and any excess foliage removed to reduce moisture loss.

Cuttings are shown overleaf in a temperature & light-controlled propagator (in this case a Geopod) - they can be kept moist by misting. There are a variety of different methods



used and types of propagator, so there is no single 'right' way to do things! They can be placed in pots, trays or cells. The cuttings medium needs to be well drained. Many people use a mix of sand, vermiculite, perlite and multipurpose compost. Some find that using just builder's sharp sand is best, with nothing else added. An equally successful technique used by many is to root cuttings on a heated sand bed, with a fleece or similar above them to keep moisture in and direct sunlight out. Some use rooting compound, but others don't! Rooting hydroponically is also becoming popular. Also note the three small pots to the bottom left of the photo. These are small 'pot tubers' grown the previous season specifically for producing cuttings material.

Cuttings being potted up a few weeks later. A sign that the cutting is successful is that the tip is showing signs of growing and a gentle tug will reveal that it has roots. They will be delicate when removed from the propagator, so it may be best to let them stabilise for a day or two before attempting to pot them up. The amount of time taken to root will depend on the time of the year & the equipment used. By about April, it often only takes a couple of weeks for them to root. Some people claim to get nearly a 100% success rate with their cuttings, but we find that if you get 70-80% success you aren't doing badly!



Recently potted up & labelled plants. We try to recycle the plastic 9cm pots each year - so this set has been used many times. These plants are safely in a heated greenhouse as it was still early in the season, but will need to be grown on and gradually hardened off before planting in May/June - again depending on local conditions. Remember, they need to be protected from any late frosts! They may need to be potted on into larger pots before planting out.

Good luck!

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