

# **DAZZLING DAHLIAS**

**THE SUPERMODELS OF THE  
GARDEN**

A close-up photograph of a bouquet of dahlias in various colors including pink, purple, yellow, and orange. The flowers are densely packed and have a ruffled, multi-petaled appearance. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green.

# **A LITTLE HISTORY**



**DAHLIA PINNATA \*DAHLIA COCCINEA\*DAHLIA ROSEA**





**KENORA CHALLENGER**



**CZARNY CHARAKTER  
THE DARKEST DAHLIA**



**DAZZLING  
SUN  
FORMAL  
DECORATIVE**



**FOREVER UNICORN DINNERPLATE**



AC DARK HORSE  
SEMI CACTUS

**VAN ISLE PRINCESS**

**KENORA MACOP B**

**LACINATED**

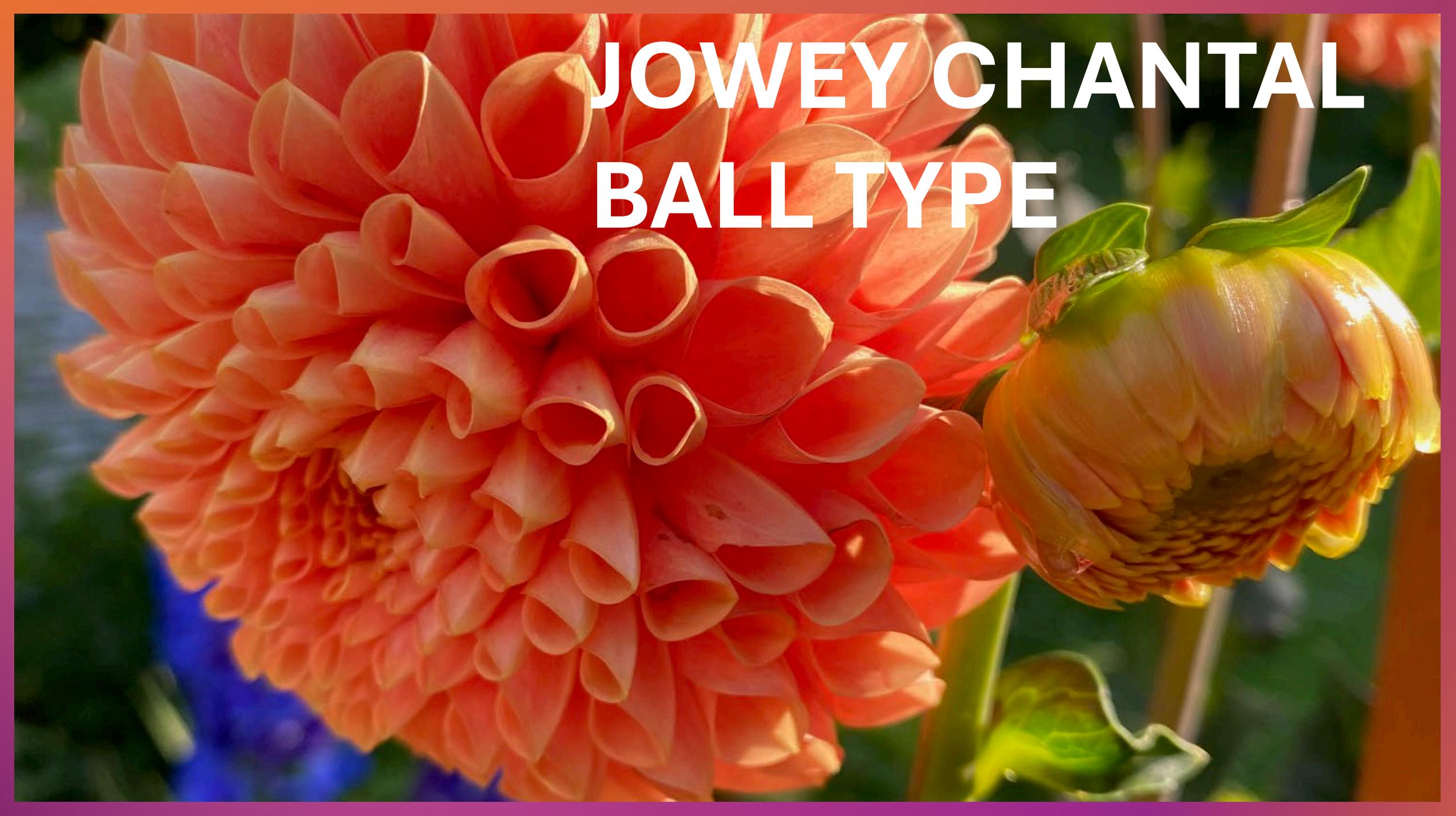


# SANDIA BROCADE ANENOME





**KARMA CHOCOLATE WATERLILY**



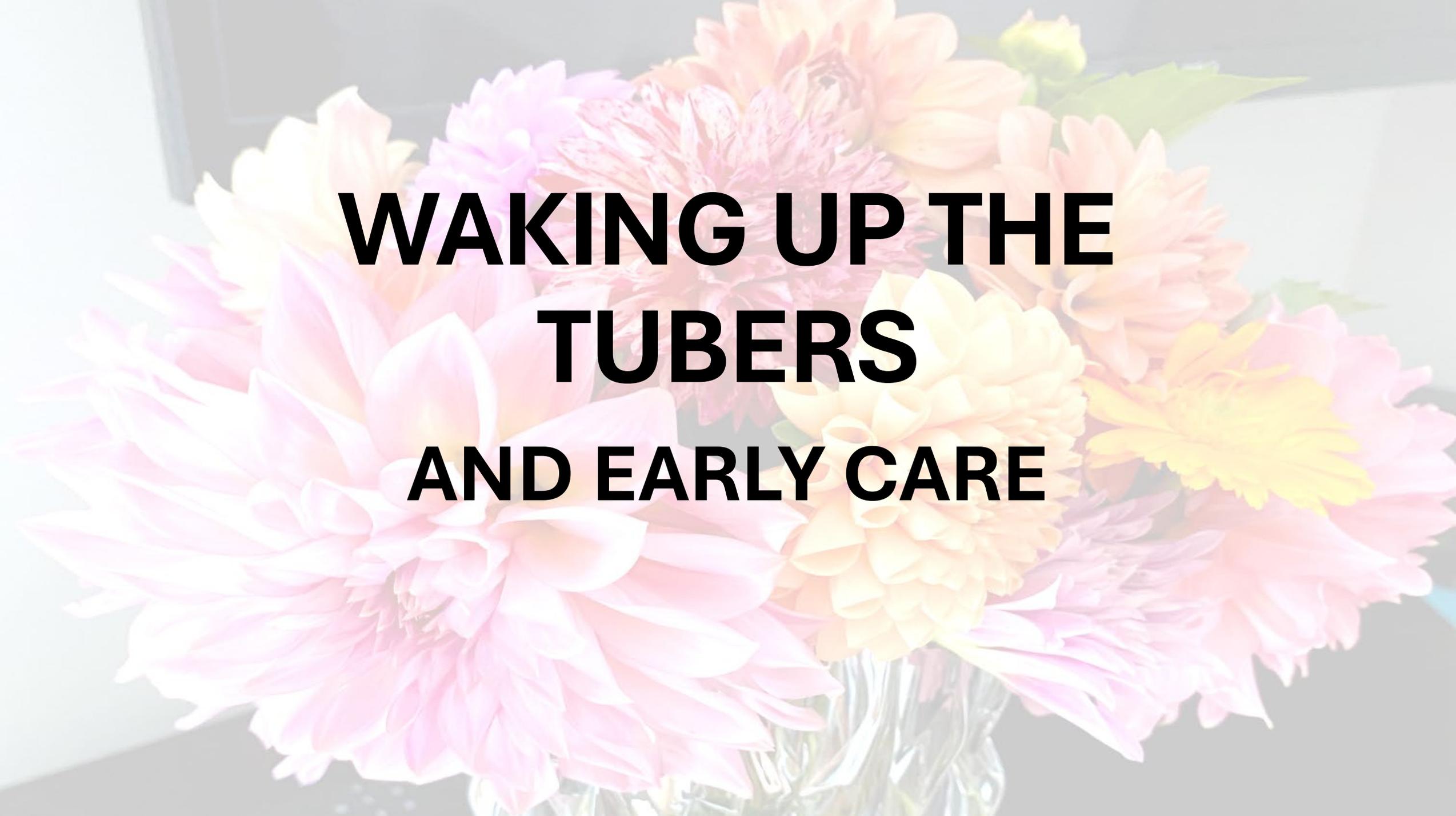
**JOWEY CHANTAL**  
**BALL TYPE**

A close-up photograph of a bouquet of dahlias. The flowers are in various stages of bloom and come in a variety of colors including light pink, deep purple, pale yellow, and soft orange. The petals are layered and have a delicate, ruffled texture. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green.

# **HOW DAHLIAS ARE GROWN**

# SEEDS, CUTTINGS AND TUBERS



A bouquet of colorful dahlias in shades of pink, yellow, and orange, arranged in a clear glass vase. The flowers are in full bloom, with many layers of petals. The background is a soft, out-of-focus indoor setting.

**WAKING UP THE  
TUBERS  
AND EARLY CARE**



A close-up photograph of a bouquet of dahlias. The flowers are in various stages of bloom and come in a variety of colors including light pink, deep purple, pale yellow, and soft orange. The petals are layered and have a delicate, ruffled texture. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light. The overall mood is bright and cheerful.

**PREPARE FOR PLANTING**



# **PINCHING DAHLIA PLANTS**

**When your plant has 3-4 sets of leaves, take the central leader out.**



A close-up photograph of a bouquet of dahlias. The flowers are in various stages of bloom and come in a variety of colors including light pink, deep purple, pale yellow, and soft orange. The petals are layered and have a delicate, ruffled texture. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green, suggesting an indoor setting with natural light. The overall mood is bright and cheerful.

**STAKE ME BABY!**











OTTO'S THRILL



**WHEN AM I EVER GOING TO  
GET FLOWERS ON THESE  
THINGS!!!**

**Not growing them for the leaves, you  
know.**



# WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY DAHLIA??







# **LEAFY GALL, CROWN GALL, VIRUS**

**BACTERIAL DISEASES**

**OH NO!!  
FROST IS  
COMING!!**





**SPLITTING AND  
STORING TUBERS  
CAREFUL WITH THAT CUTTER!!**

# SPLITTING TUBERS



# STORING TUBERS



A close-up photograph of a bouquet of dahlias. The flowers are in various stages of bloom and come in a variety of colors: light pink, deep purple, bright yellow, and soft orange. The petals are layered and have a delicate, ruffled texture. The background is a soft, out-of-focus light green. Overlaid on the center of the image is the text "DOES SIZE REALLY MATTER?" in a bold, red, sans-serif font.

**DOES SIZE REALLY MATTER?**



EYE

EYE

EYE

EYE







## **SO YOU WANT TO GROW DAHLIAS.....**

Whether the largest dinner plate, a luscious waterlily or a wild cactus type, don't be intimidated by these glorious creatures. With a little planning and preparation, these stunning blooms can be the super models of your border.

### **A LITTLE HISTORY**

The **Genus Dahlia** is a native of Mesoamerica, originally from the high plains of Mexico. They were originally grown for food by the Aztecs, as the tubers (and the flowers) are edible.

The Dahlia came from Mexico to the Botanical Gardens in Madrid in 1791 and was named by **Antonio Cavanille** in honour of **Andreas Dahl**, the Swedish scientist and environmentalist. The illustrations above originate from Cavanille's "*Icones et Descriptiones Plantarum*" 1791 & Oct 1795. Colour has been added and is based on

herbarium sheets held at Real Madrid Botanical garden. ©2004 National Dahlia Society.

Modern dahlias look little like the original plant, thanks to brilliant hybridizers all over the world. At present there are 42 recognized species in existence, and over **57,000** cultivars.

The colour selection is beyond compare, as are the shapes and sizes available. Everything from purest white to deepest black is available in the Dahlia pantheon.

### HOW DAHLIAS ARE GROWN

**Seeds:** Dahlias grown from seed are not genetically identical to the mother plant. They turn out with irregular forms and flowers. Dahlia breeders know that it takes planting hundreds of seeds to discover a keeper.

**Cuttings:** The ideal way to increase stock if you only have a single tuber of a variety. You can take 5-6 cuttings from one tuber. When you remove one sprout, the tuber will send up more around the site of the one taken off. Most likely they will produce a nice tuber

clump in fall, if given ideal growing conditions. Plants from cuttings are identical to the mother plant.

This video shows how to take cuttings and pulls.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nEg0watL8XA&t=10s>

**Tubers:** The easiest and the most popular way to grow dahlias. It'll give a good clump of tubers at digging. The flowers and plant traits are identical to the mother tuber.

## **WAKING UP THE TUBERS**

When you get your tubers from a grower, check them for broken necks, rot, mold and the presence of some crown as well as an eye-you can usually see one. The sprout will only come out of the crown at the top of the tuber, never the side or the bottom. If the neck is broken, the tuber is useless. Contact the vendor as soon as possible to arrange for replacement or refund.

**PRE STARTING YOUR DAHLIA TUBERS-**When starting them inside, it's heat they need to wake up. Different varieties can take longer to set sprouts

than others, so don't despair if one is sitting there doing nothing for the longest time. Once you see eyes sprouting, you can put them into a pot with damp potting mix-and that's damp, not wet-they can rot if they get too much water before they have roots to take it up with. Trust me on this one. I've murdered plenty of tubers by drowning.

They will not need watering until you see leaves an inch or so above the soil level. That means roots have started to grow and the tuber is able to take up water. I lay mine out in dollar store tubs with a couple of inches of damp soil so I can watch for sprouts and monitor the dampness of the soil.

At that point, they will need proper grow lights and 14 hours of light per day. You don't want to start them too early unless you have proper lighting, they can get leggy very quickly resulting in weak plants. At this time of year, even a southern exposure might not be enough light for them.

If you plant the tubers directly in the soil, they can take 3 to five weeks to sprout. If you do, it's a good idea to put slug bait around your planting site, tender shoots are a favorite of the slimy fellows.

To save yourself a lot of frustration, lay your dahlia beds out with colour, plant height and bloom size. That way you won't have a 5-foot plant in front of a 3-foot plant. Next, make your tags. I use adjustable tree tags that wrap around the support or the stem of the plants, but you can use any tags. I also write the name of the variety right on the tuber when I split them or get them from a grower.

Young plants need to be hardened off, but tubers do not. Get them ready for their new home outside slowly, 3-4 days in the shade then increase their exposure to sunlight a bit every day for 3-4 days. When soil temps are 10-15 degrees C consistently, and nighttime temps are at least 10-12C, they can be planted in the ground, usually in late May or early June when there is no risk of frost.

The weather network will become your obsession, you will start checking it 20 times a day.

## PREPARE FOR PLANTING

When planting pre-sprouted and potted plants, water them well, set them out by their planting holes, with supports already in place.

Depending on the mature size of the plant, 12-18" apart is recommended. They can grow a large bunch of tubers over the season, and you want to give them room to do so. Dig down at least a foot and loosen the soil with a garden fork. Dahlias thrive best in rich soil with good drainage. They can rot in standing water, so good drainage is imperative. You want your tubers planted at least 4-6" under the level of the soil, and you can bury the sprout up to the first set of leaves. These girls are big feeders, so add some well composted manure or garden compost when planting. Set the plant in so that when filled in, the surface of the soil will form a depression around the stalk. This is to ensure that any water which is applied can soak down to the roots and not run away.

The plant should then be tied to its support and labelled.

When your plants have 3-4 sets of leaves, it's a good idea to pinch out the growing tip. This will cause lateral stems to start growing and will make for bushier plants and more flowers.

When your plants are about a foot tall, it's time for another round of fertilizer. Well rotted manure or garden compost is the best fertilizer to use.

You can also plant dahlias in large pots, but don't forget the supports! They will need more attention to watering and feeding planted in pots.

## **PLANT SUPPORT METHODS**

Dahlias need support, no two ways about it. Some of the larger cultivars can grow as high as five to six feet, and the huge flowers combined with hollow stems can make a windy day your worst nightmare.

For those of you gardeners with a few plants, placing sturdy posts next to tubers at planting time can give you the best results. Another good option is a very strong tomato cage-the flimsy ones won't cut it!

If you are mixing single dahlias into a perennial garden stake each plant individually and tie-in as they grow. If you are growing many dahlias in the border or in a cutting garden, the corral method is the best option.

**CORRAL METHOD-** Put stakes on the corners of your dahlia beds and use a strong poly twine to enclose the plants. Place them at 4 foot intervals -- if they are further apart, the twine may sag and not provide the support needed.

Wrap twine around the first post and then move onto the next and the next. The lowest row of twine should be 12-18" off the ground. As the plants get taller, encircle them with additional twine at 12" heights.

## Summer maintenance

Although dahlias come from a very warm climate, the harsh sun of summer is hard on them. They do need a lot of water as they are growing, and extreme heat inhibits their ability to take up nutrients.

Gauge what they need in June when there tends to be more rain, in July, water at least once a week for 15-20 mins, more if it is REALLY hot. They can flag in the afternoon sun, but will recover when the sun is lower. If they are flagging, don't water them, they are stressed and won't be able to take it up-shade them if you can. Water them in the evening or the next morning. In mid-August, strip the lower leaves about 10-12 inches from the bottom of your plants. This increases air flow and can help with powdery mildew.

## WHEN AM I EVER GOING TO GET FLOWERS ON THESE THINGS!!!!

In Zone 5-6, they will generally start blooming in mid- to late July- 10-16 weeks after planting depending on the variety. If they have been started and potted up early (I start many of mine in late March) they will bloom a bit earlier, but even if you planted tubers directly in the soil, they will catch up. They will keep blooming until the frost, and the more blooms you cut from the plant, the more you will get. Deadheading is also very important for flower production, so get out there with your cutters! For cut flowers, cut down to the second set of leaves to stimulate new buds. The more you cut, the more flowers and stronger stems you will get. The hardest lesson to learn!

Here is a video on how to cut for maximum stem length-

[https://youtu.be/zwnR\\_BDBG9E?si=aNn3-BlOuw\\_mEQ0l](https://youtu.be/zwnR_BDBG9E?si=aNn3-BlOuw_mEQ0l)

## WHAT'S WRONG WITH MY DAHLIA?

**Pests.** Oh, do they love the dahlias. Earwigs, aphids, slugs, thrips and lygus bugs. How to deal with so many hungry bugs.

**Aphids-** Ladybugs, parasitic wasps, and lacewings will all attack aphids, so [preserve these beneficial insects](#) as much as possible by avoiding the use of chemical pesticides and providing a varied, nectar and pollen-rich environment to attract and keep them near. Sweet Allyssum, dill, fennel and yarrow are favorites of the green lacewing, plant them near your dahlias.

A strong stream of cold water can help wash aphids off the plants, and insecticidal soap applications can be effective for a bad infestation. If there is a bunch of them on a stem, a gloved hand running up the stem will take care of them.

**Earwigs** Since these insects like to hide out under boards, in vines, and under loose clumps of soil during the day, you can create a trap for them. Attach a red solo cup filled with damp paper towel upside down near the stem with a big hair clip or

laundry peg and empty it in the morning by knocking the earwigs into a pail of soapy water.

But remember – these insects can also provide aphid and other types of pest-gobbling services. They're not all bad!

**Slugs and snails-** These slimy pests are most destructive early in the growing season when dahlia foliage is soft and tender. As the plants grow, their stems and leaves toughen up and become more resistant to damage which means they will crawl up and eat the flowers! You can protect young plants with an organic slug repellent such as Sluggo. I pick them off and feed them to my frogs.

**Tarnished Plant bugs-** If your dahlia flowers are occasionally distorted in shape or don't open properly, this may indicate tarnished plant bug damage. These pests (both the adults and the much smaller nymphs) have piercing-sucking mouth parts. As they feed, their saliva leaves behind a toxin that damages plant tissues. Tarnished plant bugs overwinter in leaf litter, so controlling weeds and mowing nearby areas can

help reduce overwintering populations. Insecticidal soaps can help reduce the severity of outbreaks. When I see them flying near my dahlias, I hold a tub of soapy water under a bloom and give it a smack which sends them careening into the tub.

**Thrips-** Thrips are tiny and difficult to see. They are sucking insects that can cause discoloration and distortion of both leaves and blossoms. Left unchecked, they will weaken the entire plant. Thrips can also transmit bacteria and viruses from one plant to another. Plants that are stressed by heat and drought are particularly susceptible to thrips-they can actually smell them. Keeping your dahlias consistently watered can help discourage them.

There is scientific proof that raising the BRIX level of your plants will deter pests-when the sugar content is at a high level, they can't digest the plant material. Here is a link to a podcast explaining the process-Jennie Love-No Till Flower podcast, Dr. Tom Dykstra, entymologist.

<https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/the-no-till-flowers-podcast/id1545850888?i=1000566894066>

It also grows stronger plants. I have not tried this method yet, but I am trying it this year. Galena Berkumpas from Micro Flower Farm in the PNW swears by it.

**Leafy Gall**-This peculiar bacterial disease is caused by the bacterium *Rhodococcus fascians*. Infections cause clusters of excessive, distorted growth, with fused shoots, usually at the base of the plant. The disease is not curable and can spread to other plants. Remove the affected plant and the soil it was in, don't plant Dahlias or their cousins there for 2 years.

**Crown Gall**-Swellings (galls) on the plant stems or roots. In some cases, all the root systems may be replaced by massive, swollen tissues. Galls are usually rounded with a rough, irregular surface. They first appear as small protuberances on the plant surface. Plant growth may be affected, but often there is little apparent damage and root galls

may go unnoticed until you lift the tubers. Remove and destroy any infected plant tissue, remove soil and don't replant with Dahlias or their cousins.

Here is a video about Gall-

<https://youtu.be/b3ggF0YZ7w8?si=J8t2Xc363UjGL-ox>

**HOW TO MINIMIZE GALL-** Gall has become a problem with imported stock from Holland. The tubers are harvested and split by machines, with no sanitation precautions, so they have no oversight. Here are the best ways to avoid it-

- Avoid purchasing tubers from mass market purveyors and obtain healthy stock from specialist dahlia growers.
- Take cuttings only from good stock.
- Dip dividing or cutting tools regularly in Lysol, 70% ethanol, or a 1:5 bleach/ water solution.

- Destroy gall-infected plants by putting these in the trash, not in compost or by burning and replacing the soil with new.

The Canadian Dahlia Growers group on Facebook has a list of all the Canadian growers in the Files section, and if you are looking for specific cultivars, The Dahlia Addict can direct you. Make sure you choose Canada at the top of the page.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/424939755372212/>

Here's a good article with visuals on diseases and pests-

<https://www.epicgardening.com/dahlia-pests/>

## **VIRUS**

Determining whether a dahlia plant is affected by a virus or experiencing a nutrient deficiency can

sometimes be challenging, as certain symptoms may overlap. When faced with unusual leaf patterns, stunted growth, or other abnormalities, it's important to carefully evaluate the situation. Conducting a soil test to assess nutrient levels and adjusting fertilization accordingly can help rule out nutrient deficiencies. It is strongly recommended to do a soil test prior to your growing season. Viral infections often result in mosaic patterns, mottling, or yellowing of leaves, and these symptoms tend to appear more randomly across the plant. A study was done in the US, and 85% of plants tested carried a virus. Dahlia viruses cannot be cured, but affected plants can recover. Nutrients and regular watering can sometimes turn an infected plant around. If it does not, dig it up and dispose of it the garbage or burn pile.

### **OH NO!!! Frost is coming!!**

One day your dahlias are sparkling in the sun and your heart swells with the beauty they embody and

the next day they are a bunch of brown sticks with soggy brown blobs on top.

The bad news? Your dahlias are done for this year. The good news? You will have lots of FREE tubers for next year!!

A couple of weeks or so before the FIRST FROST is due, cut down on watering and completely stop fertilization of the plants to ensure that tubers overwinter well. Your first frost date is important to know so you can plan your digging schedule. You don't need to wait for the frost, once the dahlias have been in the ground for 120 days, they are mature and can be stored for the winter.

Cut the plants down with 4-5 inches of stalk remaining. Remember, next year's dahlias come from where the tuber attaches to the stalk so take care not to break it off. Loosen the soil with a garden fork starting about 1 foot away from the trunk of the plant and gently lift it watching for the tuber clump. If your soil is compacted, gently dig

from the top to remove some soil to see where your tubers are. Don't worry if you break the bottom of a tuber, if it has a crown and a neck, it will be fine.

## **NOW THAT I'VE DUG THESE TUBERS UP...**

There are several methods of dealing with tubers. You can leave the whole clumps for winter storage or separate the individual tubers for storage at time of digging.

If you leave the clumps whole, knock the excess dirt off them, don't wash them and cut the stalk down to an inch above the tubers, label them and allow them to dry upside down for a day. Some people dry them in the sun, others swear you shouldn't. I dry mine in the garage out of the light, door open for air circulation. Don't leave them for more than 2 days, they will start to dehydrate and may not overwinter. In the spring, you will be separating them, which can be tougher as the tubers have hardened up over the winter. It will, however, be

easier to spot the eyes that your new plants will grow from.

Separating the tubers in the fall is easier as the tubers are moist and softer than when they have been stored all winter, although they are more fragile. If you choose to separate in the fall, you will need to wash your clumps or brush off most of the dirt. Using a very sharp set of secateurs, split the clump in half to make it easier to work with. Cut each tuber from the stalk making sure the neck isn't broken and there is crown attached. When they are dry, use an indelible marker to write the name of the dahlia right on the tuber.

Splitting clumps takes some practice, and don't worry if you break some tubers off, you will probably have lots. **Pro tip**-use two pairs of secateurs, so you can dip them in an antibacterial solution between clumps. Helps stop the spread of diseases.

Splitting is much better as a visual, so here are some Youtube videos to make it easier to understand.

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN35z3RWxK8&ab\\_channel=SwanIslandDahlias](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dN35z3RWxK8&ab_channel=SwanIslandDahlias)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3kBK7xe6eI&ab\\_channel=Evelyn%27sGardenandNursery](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j3kBK7xe6eI&ab_channel=Evelyn%27sGardenandNursery)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJFeZiZnCMg&ab\\_channel=DahliaSEMDS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJFeZiZnCMg&ab_channel=DahliaSEMDS)

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MD-jDdMw7c&ab\\_channel=TrueloveSeeds](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4MD-jDdMw7c&ab_channel=TrueloveSeeds)

<https://youtu.be/1QHNI9ZHWYA?si=ZPgtLirFh730XyZN>

## **STORING TUBERS**

There are several ways to store dahlia tubers, separated or not. Cardboard boxes lined with plastic, Styrofoam coolers or plastic bins can be used, and peat moss, coarse sand, cut straw, sawdust, wood shavings or vermiculite to cover work well. Some people wrap each tuber in plastic wrap. You need to keep them dry, but not so dry that they shrivel up-70 % humidity is optimal. Make sure there is space left between each tuber and room for air circulation. It's a good idea to check them every couple of weeks for mold and dehydration. Also, keep them in the dark. I use vegetable bins with a plastic bag lining the bottom and the top loosely open for circulation. It is of paramount importance to keep them in an environment that will not freeze. Frozen equals dead!! The optimum temperature is between 5-10 degrees Celsius.

<https://youtu.be/IsTMVd1o7h8?si=yakBrfcavTz5dGC2>

<https://youtu.be/tPyuuZ0BjG0?si= Pkf5Ax2DMH4sEwo>

<https://mygardenbee.com/blog/f/dividing-dahlia-tubers>

## **DO I HAVE TO DIG THE TUBERS UP?**

You can treat dahlias like an annual by simply leaving the tubers in the ground and letting them decay over the winter. In this zone, it is very unlikely they will survive, so you can get new dahlias every spring!

## **DOES SIZE MATTER?**

**In a word, no.**

### **CONCLUSION**

The days are getting longer, and the itch to start planting is growing! This brings us back to the beginning, the exciting cycle of new life and fresh spring flowing into a sultry summer in the garden. No matter what your level of expertise is, consider adding Dahlias to your garden. They are indescribably beautiful with colours and shapes to fit every taste.

**At this point, you will already have spent way more money on tubers in your mind than you ever thought you could. There is a frenzy when the dahlia sales start, and once that bug bites you, it's a bug you won't want to be free of!**