

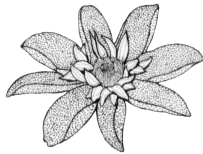
**Stellar:** Ray florets are narrow and roll upwards having a slight recurve to the stem.

**Waterlily:** Florets cup upwards just as the true waterlilies do.

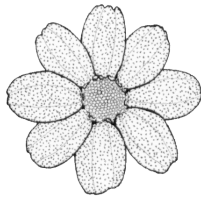
**Peony:** Resembles a double flower having several rows of ray florets, but the yellow disk florets are showing.

**Anemone:** Distinctive dahlia having one row of ray florets surrounding elongated disk florets.

**Collarette:** A row of ray florets with a collar of petaloids, or half petals, surrounding the yellow disk flowers in the center.



**Single:** One row of ray florets surrounding yellow disk florets.



**Mignon single:** Similar to the single but on a much shorter plant.



**Orchid:** One row of ray florets that curl upward to form long tubes surrounding the center yellow disk florets.

**Novelty Open:** Additional types of dahlias that do not fit into any established categories. These cultivars will show a yellow disc center at peak stage.

**Novelty Fully Double:** Additional types of dahlias that do not fit into any established categories. These cultivars should have no yellow disc florets showing at peak stage.

## For more information

*Growing Dahlias* (PM 1925) is available from local ISU Extension offices. Additional information also is available from these Web sites:

American Dahlia Society  
1 Rock Falls Court  
Rockville, MD 20854  
[www.dahlia.org](http://www.dahlia.org)

Colorado Dahlia Society  
[www.dahlias.net](http://www.dahlias.net)

ISU Extension Publications—  
[www.extension.iastate.edu/store](http://www.extension.iastate.edu/store)

ISU Horticulture—  
[www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu](http://www.yardandgarden.extension.iastate.edu)

Minnesota Dahlia Society  
[www.aplacetoremember.com/MyDahlia/mndahlia.htm](http://www.aplacetoremember.com/MyDahlia/mndahlia.htm)

Reiman Gardens—  
[www.reimangardens.iastate.edu](http://www.reimangardens.iastate.edu)

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REIMAN  
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# Dahlias



IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY

University Extension

## Dahlia history

Dahlias are native to the mountainous region of Mexico. The 3-inch specimens discovered by Swedish botanist Anders Dahl most likely consisted of one row of ray florets—mistakenly termed petals—surrounding yellow center disk florets. This single type dahlia is still grown. In addition, dahlias now range up to 16 inches across and are available in almost every color except green, brown, and true blue.

## Planting tips

Dahlias perform best in full sun and well-drained soil; they may rot in wet, poorly drained soils. Tubers radiate out from the dahlia crown like the spokes of a wagon wheel. Viable tubers have an eye originating from the crown portion, plus a neck connecting the crown to the body of the tuberous root.

For earlier blooming, plant dahlia tubers in 8-inch standard pots in early April. Fill pots about half-full with a commercial, sterilized potting mix or make your own by combining equal amounts of sphagnum peat, perlite, and sterilized soil. Place the tuber horizontally on the soil mix and cover with 1 to 2 inches of soil mix; water thoroughly. When growth emerges, place pot in full sun. Plants may remain in pots or be transplanted to the garden.

Frost can damage or destroy the plants so do not plant outdoors too early. Wait until May 5 to 10 in southern Iowa, May 10 to 15 in central Iowa, or after May 20 in northern Iowa.

Before planting, drive a sturdy support—such as a metal fence post or wooden stake—into the ground. Doing this prior to planting ensures that the tubers will not be damaged. To plant tubers, dig a hole about 6 to 8 inches deep on either side of the support. Place the tuber horizontally in the ground. Then place soil back in the hole. The dahlias should emerge in about 2 weeks.

## Growing tips

“Feeding” dahlias is a 2-step process. About a week before planting, work an appropriate amount of a complete fertilizer (5-10-5 or 5-10-10) into the planting area. Repeat in July.

As the plants grow, carefully tie them to the support with yarn, thick cotton cord, or baling twine. Fishing line, wire, and other narrow materials should not be used.

After the dahlias reach a height of 10 to 12 inches, they need an inch of water per week. Mulching with grass, straw, or pine needles conserves moisture and keeps the developing tubers cooler. Watering with a soaker hose is an efficient method.

## Disbudding improves blooms

To get the best bloom, remove two sets of axillary buds located beneath the main bud on either side of the stem where the leaves meet. If left on the plant, the axillary buds will develop and flower. However, the quality of the blooms is reduced and weaker stems result. Deadhead (remove) spent blooms to promote additional flowering.

## Fall care

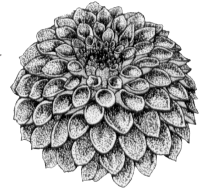
After a killing frost, remove the brown foliage and stems but leave the tuberous roots in the soil an additional 1 to 2 weeks to “cure.” Use a potato fork or sand shovel to carefully remove tubers; label each clump. Wash off as much soil as possible and remove the rest of the stalk down to the crown. Washing helps keep the storage media clean and reduces the risk for insect damage. Let the tubers sit until they are dry to the touch (usually about one day), then place clumps upside down in boxes and cover with vermiculite, sphagnum peat, or wood shavings. Store the boxes in the coolest part of the house, preferably between 40° and 55°F.

## Dahlia classification

The American Dahlia Society recognizes 15 official colors and describes 18 types.

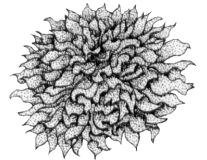
### Formal Decorative:

Relatively flat ray florets flow in the same direction forming a hollow globe.

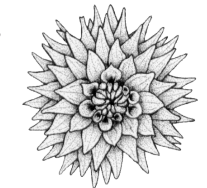


### Informal decorative:

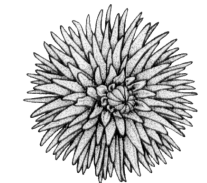
Wavy or twisted ray florets that have a random placement.



**Semi-cactus:** Ray floret curls less than half the length.

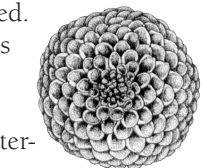


**Cactus:** The top color of the ray florets roll under to form a point. To be classified a cactus type, the ray floret must curl more than half its length.



**Laciniated:** Ray florets are split, giving an overall fringed effect.

**Ball:** Ray florets curl upward to form a tube. Individual flowers are rounded. Blooms range from 3½ inches across and up.



**Miniature ball:** Same characteristics as the ball, only smaller.

**Pompon:** The smallest flower type. These can be up to 2 inches across and resemble the ball dahlias but differ in size and are more globular in shape.