

Rye Driftwood Garden Club

The Joy of Growing Dahlias

By Claire McGrail & Amy Capasso

Due to Covid-19, the Rye Driftwood Garden Club is currently not holding meetings. Please check our website at www.ryehgardenclub.org for more information. In the meantime, we hope you enjoy this article about growing dahlias.

Welcome to the joyous world of growing dahlias! You will be amazed at the colorful, small varieties suitable for pots and borders, including Pompon, Unwin, Collarette, and Orchid dahlias. Some larger types are Decorative, Cactus and Dinnerplate. Versatile and bountiful, dahlias are worth the effort for the profusion of flowers they produce from mid-summer until hard frost.

Since dahlias are natives of South America and Mexico, they can remain in the ground year-round in warmer climates. However, in colder Northeast climates, they must be dug out in the fall, stored, and replanted in the spring. Dahlias grow from a “tuber” (not a technically a bulb), which resembles a potato-like clump. The tuber’s “eyes” (similar to a potato) produce flowers. After the threat of frost, late May is usually a good time to plant. Here are some steps to follow to grow dahlias:

- Choose a sunny spot with at least 6 hours of *full* sun.
- Dig a hole for planting, and be sure soil is aerated. Amend soil generously with Bulb Tone, aged manure, and compost.
- For new tubers, the hole should be approximately 2x the depth of the tuber. For large or mature dahlia clumps, adjust depth and amendments accordingly. Plant 2-3 feet apart.
- Place the tuber with growing eye facing up. Cover with soil.
- Do not water until leaves appear.
- Remove slugs with “Sluggo Plus,” as they eat tender emerging shoots. Use “Plantskydd” to deter bunnies and deer from eating leaves and buds.
- The growing dahlia produces a first center bud. Pinch this bud to create a strong foundation. Don’t be afraid!
- Place tomato cages around larger varieties for support. The cages will disappear as the plant fills out. Coax lower and unruly leaves into the cage as they grow.
- Especially during dry, hot weather, water dahlias deeply and consistently.
- Be vigilant in early July for pests such as beetles and earwigs. Remove them and spray leaves and buds with Pyrethrin organic pest control.
- For larger blooms, “pinch” small side shoots (similar to tomato suckers) that emerge from a large joint.

- Dahlias can be grown in a pot. At the end of the season, after foliage is cut down, pots should be stored (an unheated basement is ideal) until the next spring. Fresh soil and amendments can then be added.

Once your dahlias are planted, watch with wonder how the tubers produce a profusion of gorgeous flowers. Congratulations! You are now a bonafide member of Dahlia Mania!

Stay tuned for more dahlia tips. If you have questions, reach out to us on our website www.ryenhgardenclub.org using the “contact us” page.

Photos supplied by Sheila Jeter





