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Dahlias the Popular Fad of the Day

Ease of Culture Readily Wins Popular Favor—A Treatise on This Most Wonderful Outdoor Flower.

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We are now entering the era of the dahlia, a genus to which is attributed the beauty of all other flowers. The fanciers and flower culturists are today turning their attention to this wonderful flower, realizing the possibilities for professional cultivation, exhibition, home beautifying and landscape effects.

There is no other flower that will respond so quickly to your care, given such a variety of color and form and with a wide range of uses.

As a cut flower the dahlia holds sway from the beginning of September until killing frosts, being used in the most elaborate and fashionable decorations. It also plays a big part in nature's work, and will prove a source of delight in your garden.

The selection of the best and most satisfactory varieties is indeed a puzzling question for the amateur, as there are thousands of varieties, with the thousands of variants of each, making it advisable for the amateur just starting with dahlia culture to select varieties from the varieties of today ranging from $5 to $25 and $25 to $100. The flowers of today are so constant something at all just because it is cheap and trust to culturists, as many young nurserymen are naturally healthy stock.

It is needless to give a lengthy description of the novelties and standard varieties of dahlias, as has been described in the many dahlia catalogues issued by the various dahlia bulb dealers.

Any year of experience the following article may solve a few cultural problems. An endeavor will be made to explain, in language that can be fully understood, the directions and suggestions of the dahlia bulb growers, furnishing the location, fertility of the soil and climate, as well as the culture, so that you will believe the theories in general will hold good.

Preparation of the Soil.

Dahlias will grow well in almost any kind of soil from a light sandy loam to a sandy loam, clay, or black, so long as it is well drained, and not under a tree or in the tree roots which gives much needed moisture, which is essential to plant food.

The essential need is drainage. Loamy soil is to be considered in this respect, but heavy soils do. If the ground is too wet, the dahlia roots will readily rot in the soil, and even the best dahlia varieties will not grow. The soil should be well rotted over in the beginning of the year, with the addition of a liberal quantity of leaf mold or peat moss, which will be necessary to make the soil light and loose. The soil should be kept well drained at all times, and not allowed to remain waterlogged for any length of time. The dahlia does not thrive in wet, damp soil.

Dividing Roots.

If the dahlia is to be overwintered in the garden, it is necessary to divide the roots in the spring. The plants should be kept covered or dug up and placed in a cool, dry place, without any moisture in the soil, until the danger of frost is past. When the plants are to be divided, they should be cut into two or three pieces, each piece containing a bud, and each bud should be placed in a box or pot, and kept in a cool place until the danger of frost is past.

Planting.

Dahlia roots should be planted in the open ground about one inch deep, with a three-inch space between each plant. The soil should be rich, well drained, and free from weeds. The soil should be well rotted over in the fall, and the dahlia roots should be set out in the spring, as soon as the danger of frost is past. The soil should be kept well drained at all times, and not allowed to remain waterlogged for any length of time. The dahlia does not thrive in wet, damp soil.

Cut Worms.

If your garden is infested with cut worms, as is the case with a sod of old, an application of the following will be a reliable protection: One part pail of water, one part molasses in a gallon of water, ten pounds of sugar. Mix together and stir in enough wheat beer to make a reasonably dry mash.

Cultivation.

Work and work with a blessing to man, but few of us look at it that way. Although I am not recommending the sowing of weed seed in the culture of dahlias, I am sure that the same seed bed will work well if the seeds are sown as soon as the soil can be prepared and if the seed is sown as soon as the soil can be prepared.

Irrigation in the Heat of the Day.

Opinion varies on this phase also, but for lack of other means of cooling the soil of the plant, it is a recommended fact that watering in the heat of the day will cause the flowers to scald, as the sun's rays will cause the water to run down the plant and burn the petals. In bright sunlight, with the mercury at 120 degrees, irrigation and transpiration, open the plants with water at a temperature of 60 degrees and imagine the shade. If they were human they would make such a noise unresting the whole neighborhood would be aroused. Should the urge to move be resisted, dahlia lovers will keep the plant cool through the heat and change the soil to a lower one. But for years, the desire to move has been lessened, outside of a little burning of the flowers, which are never very bad, by having soil 12 inches deep and a dahlia garden there will be no heat for these flowers to scald.

Pruning and Disbudding.

The first step in pruning and disbudding is to start your bush in the right form. With an apple tree you would cut off the side branches until the tree was high enough to head and allow to develop only the branches that will make a shapely tree, but with a dahlia a bush is preferable, although some people grow dahlias from simply because they want to grow so many in a small yard that it will only place to bloom in two or so. If they do, the survival of the strongest, the bushiest, will bloom and will not flower. Should you wish to grow (never more than two), Danish disbudding is the way to go. Pruning will be started in the middle of May. On each stem, it is left to the grower's discretion to allow the sprouts on most varieties should be pinched out of the eyes on each branch. By the time these get a start the second set of eyes on the new growth will take over and be the shoulders of the future flowers. These will be 15 bush or blossoms, but by this time another pair will have started from below. This early disbudding and pruning is not only necessary but must be practiced for your second crop of flowers and by removing these leaves, you will increase the strength of the bush will be bound on the fourth set of flowers, but if you want extra large flowers you can reduce this number to about four or a few of the second crop, but commercially the former method is the best. Two or three leaves, however, is the limit for such variety of flowers or this on your dahlia and the third should contain a dozen or two or more. They can be done in 7-18 inch stems have been cut from many bushes of Breck's Day eight weeks cutting.
Excessive Branching.

Some varieties, such as Pierrot, Crystal and Francis White, branch to excess and stock in the lower part. To prevent this, bud spraying or potash dusting should be done, but not until plants are up 3 ft. Never, even in the presence of damping-off and dying young 15 years ago in my first row of dahlias. I did not know what was wrong, but did this on the principle that one is much better at taking care of the healthy bushes than nursing the sick. If this was practiced throughout the entire season, we would have very little Mosaic today, as the percentage each year is continually increasing, showing that this is a disastrous and the evil of this disease. If the thrip is very bad or the dahlias are neglected they may appear to have Mosaic or they may even contract it.

Keep the plants healthy, clean and vigorous, and your path will be strewn with dahlias.

Good varieties, healthy stock and the proper care are sure to give notable results and pleasure.

Thrips.

During the hot dry spells the thrips are always active and the injury they cause is on the tender buds causes them to dry and fall. Irrigation at this time seems to drive them off to some extent, also the healthier the bushes the less damage can be done.

The thrips can be killed by spraying with Black Lead Dust and White Oath Song at the prescribed proportions on the packages, only use both together. Spraying the foliage will do as well, unless you hit the thrips directly with the spray, which is very difficult, as they fly at the last disturbance. When the weather becomes cool they will disappear, and as the dahlias are not very good during the winter, their damage is only minor unless they pick out cattie leaves and drain their vitality by sucking the sap. This is very undesirable to spray good, and then cut the bush to give them a new start.

The dahlia is not susceptible to the ravages of insects like the thrips, and is therefore of comparatively easy culture.

Cut Flowers.

In cutting dahlias, do not make the usual mistake of cutting the flowers if they are fully open, but cut them with the centre yet to unfold. Cut in this way the flowers should last at least a week with care. Some prefer to have all the buds and foliage remain on the stem, which adds to the beauty of the bouquet, but will cause the flowers to wilt and die much quicker than if all the buds and most of the foliage are removed.

The physical action of a cut flower is to take water up into the stem which evaporates through the flowers and foliage. The sooner this action of evaporation or transpiration takes place the longer the life of the flower.

Flowers should be cut in the evening or early morning, and immediately put in water in a cool, dark place for an hour or two before being arranged in the house. Should you wish to send them to your friends, leave in water and fully freshened, then pack in a corrugated pasteboard box lined with paper, fasten the stems down securely at centre of the box by taping in a wooden strip, sprinkles lightly and close up air-tight. Use a substantial package. Marking the flowers so as to fill the box so they cannot batter, but not too tight, and ship on the best mail trains. Following these directions parcel post is very satisfactory.

Dahlias have a bad habit of being sent from Vineland, N. J., to Detroit, Mich. If flowers should be cut after leaving the farm with the idea of being delivered promptly, then all young leaves and buds will be killed by the water temperature when the flowers are received. The plants should be cut and shipped at the earliest possible moment.

Digging and Storing.

After the first killing or black frost cut all the tops at the ground, about a week dig the root, a garden fork being preferable for the work. Leave them in the sun long enough to dry off and free the earth, but do not then freeze. When all the tops are cut away, wrap carelessly in paper, punching a corner of holes, tie with your thumb, through the paper for ventilation, then pack in an opaque and place in a cellar where there is no danger of frost, and do not near a heater. A cool moist cellar, one in which white potatoes keep well, will be very satisfactory for dahlia roots.

If the roots have been stored about a month, look them over, and if they have signs of drying up, cover them with hanging or litter, and wet the floor around them occasionally. If they show signs of wet rot, dry them off with planter paper or fine coal ashes, then wrap them again in dry paper, punching more holes for ventilation.