

Cultural Details: **Dahlia**

Dahlias are popular Summer bedding plants, generally sold as green plants or in bud, with a colour label. The Figaro series of separate colours is useful for colour themed bedding displays, and the taller types, growing up to a height of 1.5m, produce flowers which can be cut. Seed-raised Dahlias flower well especially towards the Autumn, after which the tops will die off, and though they produce a tuber to survive the Winter, they are generally treated as Annuals.

Dahlias are straightforward to produce.

Variety Selection

For packs sales use any of the dwarf types; Figaro Mixed is the best quality dwarf double flowered variety, whilst Diablo has bronze foliage. The three tall varieties, Decorative Hybrids, Pompone and Cactus Flowered, can be grown to produce cut flowers.

Programming the Crop

Sow February to March, for sales in May and June.

Propagation and Growing-on

Sow the large seeds (120 per gram) onto the surface of a free-draining, open, seed sowing compost, which should be thoroughly wetted with a suitable fungicide prior to sowing (to prevent damping-off diseases), and the trays allowed to drain. Cover seeds with a layer of vermiculite, and cover the trays with clear or milky polythene to maintain humidity, until the first seedlings are visible. Germination takes around 7 days at 18-20°C. Keep the germinating seedlings moist at all times.

Grow at 15-18°C. As soon as the plants are large enough to handle, prick out into the final container, generally a 6-pack. Grow on at around 15°C. Plants are ready for sale after around 12 weeks from sowing, generally when the first buds are beginning to form. A balanced liquid feed should be applied as plants establish in the pack.

For cut flower use plant up at 30-30cm apart outdoors, in soil with a good nutrient content, in mid-May. Plants are sturdy and should not need support.

Growth Regulators

Growth regulators can be used (according to the manufacturers' guidelines) on Dahlias, to ensure a compact habit.

Pest and Disease

Maintain good air movement through the crop, and water in the morning rather than the evening to keep the foliage dry and lessen attack by Botrytis. Pay good attention to glasshouse hygiene, using only fresh trays, pots, compost, water and clean bench tops to avoid damping-off diseases, and check for the presence of pests such as aphids and whitefly, spraying accordingly.

Information provided for guidance only, as cultural practices and climatic circumstances vary.