Fall Dahlia Tuber Digging & Storing

Typically, after 1st frost or in early October
Cut dahlias down to 6-12" around 5-14 days before digging
In a pinch, it's okay to cut and dig the same day



Processing Overview

Note: Clean & disinfect tools between tuber clumps

Step 1 - Dig Up

- Carefully Dig Up Tuber Clump
- Gently Take off Dirt
- Keep Variety Label with Tuber Clump

Step 2 – Initial Clean-Up

- Trim Off Large Roots, Rot & Extra Stems
- Wash with "Shower" Setting

Step 3 – Dividing & Detail Rinse

- Divide Tubers from Clump, Keep with Label
- Gently Wash Off Remaining Dirt
- Put in Well Vented Area to Dry

*Dry to touch for 1-3 days, often depends on humidity

Step 4 – Packaging

- Write Variety (or Code) on Tubers with Permanent Marker
- Wrap Tubers in Plastic wrap
- If Desired, Record # Tubers by Variety

Step 4 – Storing

- Store Tubers at 40-50 Degrees
- Check 1-2 Times over Winter

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Step 1 - Dig Up



a. **Dig on all four sides of the plant**, about 12” from the stalk. A potato fork works well for this.

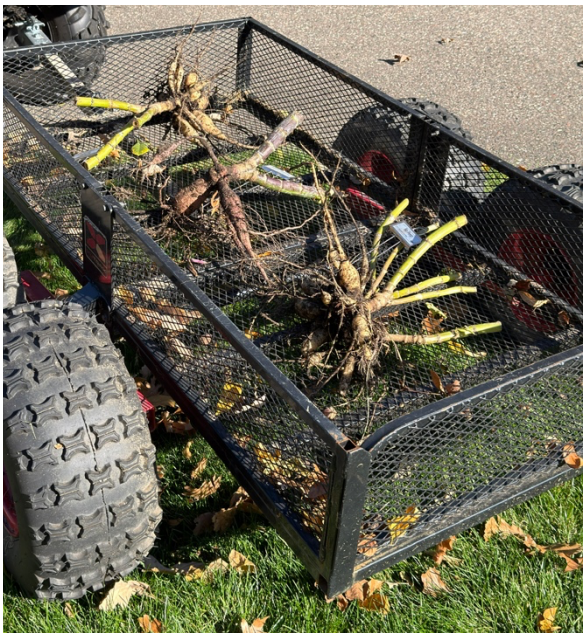
When all 4 sides are loose from longer feeder roots, push the garden fork under the clump and lift carefully.

Gently remove large clumps of dirt

Tip the clump upside down to drain out any water in the stem (large stems are hollow).

*I sometimes find it helpful to gently move some of the dirt away from the plant base with my hands before digging.

b. **Set Aside for Rinsing**



You may leave the clumps sitting for 1-2 hours before rinsing. Tuber necks are fragile, especially right after digging.

Be sure each tuber clump is labeled with the variety name.

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Step 2 – Rinse

a) Wash clumps using “Shower” Setting

b) Use paintbrush to help get dirt out of small spaces

c) Keep with variety label

Clean & disinfect tools between varieties









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Step 3 – Dividing & Detail Rinse

a) Set up an area to divide tuber clumps with cutting tools, running water (a sink is ideal), and cleaning supplies (towels, disinfectant such as Lysol aerosol spray)

b) Divide Tubers from Clump. Each tuber must have a CROWN, NECK & BODY to form a new plant. Eyes (sprouts) only form on the crown of a tuber. *See cutting details on next page.

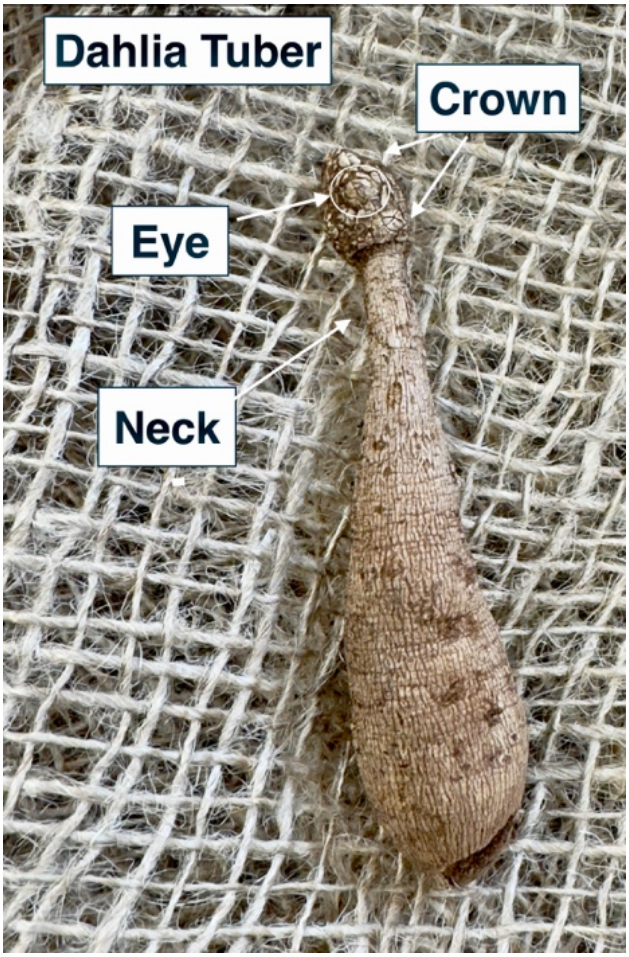
c) Gently wash off remaining dirt with water and a toothbrush. Clean tools & area with soapy water and disinfect snips between varieties.

d) Put tubers of the same variety together in a well vented area to dry for 1-3 days. Tubers will shrivel and turn hard if left too long. (I use open weave baskets from Dollar Tree).



3 – Tools for dividing





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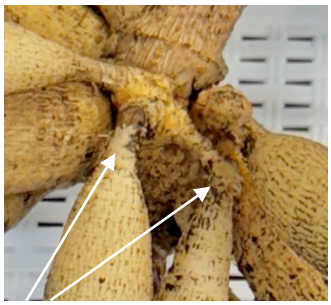
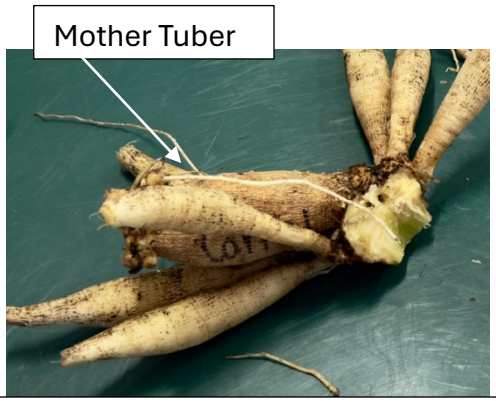
Tuber Dividing Tips





Weak or Broken necks do not store well



Not every tuber can make a new dahlia.
The "Mother" is generally darker and will not produce again. Some tubers do not have crowns. They may be fat/big or very skinny and even.



Tuber Clump before Dividing
Where to Cut in RED



Tuber Clump after Dividing
Left: Tubers to Keep. Solid, have good crowns
Right: Toss. No crown, weak/broken neck, etc.







Tuber Eyes become plant stems
Left-Easy to see eyes Middle-Can see where eyes will likely form Right-? May form eyes

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Step 4 – Marking, Packaging & Storing



a) **Write Variety** on each tuber with Sharpie or other industrial permanent marker.
Be gentle as the tuber skin is still quite thin

b) **Wrap Tubers** in plastic wrap. There are many methods, but this has worked well for me and provides very compact storage.

c) **Store Tubers** at 40-50 degrees away from critters and light until spring. Find a cold corner in your basement or the outside corner of a closet. A root cellar is idea. Be creative!

**I use a beverage or flower fridge set to 40 degrees. Any fridge may be used, but tubers cannot be stored with produce or most food products.*

Tubers before and after detail washing
Ready to be marked with variety





Tubers stored in a small beverage fridge over winter at 40 degrees. Early April turned up to 50 degrees and taken out to pot up and start early.



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How to Plastic Wrap Tubers

1) Tear off a sheet of plastic wrap. About 8-12” long. I find Reynolds Plastic Wrap the easiest to use as it is less likely to be staticky. I wrap tubers individually.

2) Place a tuber on one end and roll the plastic wrap over the end of the tuber. Fold in the 2 sides over the tuber. Now roll up into a tuber sausage.











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Resources

https://summerdreamsfarm.com/dahlia-tuber-and-splitting-guide
https://www.minnesotadahliasociety.org/tutorials
https://www.dahlia.org/growing/dahlia-university/
https://www.dahlia.org/docsinfo/articles/no-fuss-store-your-tubers-in-plastic-wrap/

YouTube on Fall Dahlia Care
** https://thefloweringfarmhouse.com/2023/09/25/5-steps-to-divide-and-store-dahlia-tubers/
Dividing: https://youtu.be/q4yKfpXZOLk?si=_5nTzH4IZYnwnmbn
https://youtu.be/j3kBK7xe6eI?si=CmsYH5QchIU3qEo3
https://youtu.be/7tZWg7PFDxA?si=9I7Ao0QPU7HTC0GK