Dahlias, with their limitless shapes and colors, add spice to any garden venture. Get off to a good start by planting the best varieties. Dahlias can vary in height from one to seven feet. Dwarf varieties are perfect for borders or containers.

**PLANTING INSTRUCTIONS:**
The ideal location for dahlias is one in full sun; however, the plants will tolerate some shade. Most dahlias thrive in well-prepared and well-drained soil. Cultivate soil 8” deep in spring. Add 2-3” of well-aged compost or manure and mix with the soil. In the Puget Sound region, the time to plant your tubers is normally late April to early May; watch out for late frosts and for prolonged cool damp weather. (Here in the Seattle area, more dahlias are killed by cool, wet springs than by winter cold.) Space about 3 feet apart for large varieties, 2 feet apart for medium, and 1 foot apart for small ones. Place stakes where the tubers are to be planted. Place the tuber horizontal with the eye upward and near the stake. As the plant grows, secure it with twist ties to the stake to protect it from wind damage.

**CARE:**
Water every two weeks in cooler weather, once to twice a week if it’s very hot and when buds begin to form. A thorough, deep soaking is better than frequent light waterings. To have a compact, bushy plant with more flowers, pinch out the center growing tip when the plant is one foot high. Choose a high quality organic rose and flower food and fertilize when you plant, then every two months until early September. Dahlias are loved by slugs in the spring, by spider mites in the heat of the summer, and by aphids, thrips, and earwigs just about any time. Use a pet safe slug and snail bait around young plants to ward off slugs. Aphids can sometimes be washed away with a sharp spray of water. Consult a Sky Nursery associate for environmentally friendly controls for insect or disease problems. Since dahlias have many surface roots, only light cultivation is recommended to keep weeds under control. A good weeding early in the season and a blanket of mulch will help eliminate a larger weed problem later.

**DIGGING & STORING:**
After the first frost or in late October, cut dahlias down leaving only a short stalk. Carefully lift the tuber clump by digging at least a foot from the stalk, then slowly pull on this ‘handle’ while using the spade as a lever. Wash the dirt off the clump, and trim off thread-like root hairs and any damaged tubers. Don’t forget to mark or label the tubers for easy identification. It is best to divide tuber clumps in the fall. Use a sharp, sturdy knife or pruners. Each tuber must be attached to a piece of the main stalk where growth ‘eyes’ appear. To prevent fungus disease, dust the tubers with sulphur. Store the roots in a cool (40-45º F) dark place such as your basement or garage. Do not let them freeze! Most growers store tubers in perforated plastic bags, half-filled with peat moss or vermiculite to prevent shriveling. Check the roots twice during the winter and discard any that show rot.

Dahlia tubers left in the ground will survive cold winter days if kept from freezing. However, the risk remains that poor drainage or a cool damp spring will cause them to rot. Good drainage is essential for tubers to regrow successfully.
DAHLIA GROWING TIPS:

- Before planting, cultivate soil to about 8” deep in spring. Add 2-3” well-aged compost or manure and mix well with soil.

- Plant tubers about 5-6” deep in early May. Space about 3 feet apart for large varieties, 2 feet apart for medium, and 1 foot apart for small/dwarf ones.

- For earlier flowers, start dahlia tubers indoor in large containers. Before planting outdoors, slowly expose the plants to the sun so they won’t sunburn. Watch for late frost! Or, wait and purchase already-budded or blooming plants, usually available at Sky starting in late June/early July.

- Put in your plant supports or stakes when you plant your tubers or starts! As your dahlias grow, secure them with twist ties to protect them from wind damage. If you wait to stake until your plants start to topple, the flower stalks could suffer damage, plus you might accidentally injure your dahlia’s roots while inserting the stakes.

- Fertilize at the time of planting, then every two months until early September. Use a good organic bulb or flower fertilizer such as Dr. Earth Rose and Flower Fertilizer, Hendrikus Bouquet, or E.B. Stone Rose and Flower Food.

- Protect from slugs with pet-safe slug bait such as Sluggo or Worry Free.

- Watch for aphids, spider mites, earwigs, thrips, and powdery mildew. See a Sky Nursery associate for environmentally friendly controls if you see a problem.

- Keep dahlias well-watered but not soggy. Drip irrigation or soaker hoses are preferable to overhead watering. If you do water overhead, the best time to do so is early morning.

- Early morning is also the best time to cut your dahlias. Bring a container of cool (not cold) water out with you, and place the cut stems immediately in water.

- For the longest-lasting cut flowers, display in a cool area away from sunlight. Change the water (and wash out the vase) daily.

- Dahlias will often overwinter if the soil is well-drained and the winter not too severe. For best results, however, you may prefer to lift your tubers and store them in a protected location. If so, dig your tubers by the end of October. Shake or wash off the soil and let the surface of the tubers dry. Store in dry peat moss, vermiculite, or sawdust. Store in a cool (40-45°F) dark place such as a basement or garage. Do not let freeze!

- The next spring, plant your tubers again. Then sit back and enjoy!