

April 2022 Ask the Experts Q&A

At the April meeting, a panel of three of CSDS's most experienced growers fielded questions submitted by the members. Thanks to Jim Kassner, Kevin Maloney, and David Sales for participating on the panel. Here are the questions and the essence of their responses.

PROPAGATING

I have some tubers that don't look great coming out of storage but have an eye on them. Will I get a stronger plant if I take a cutting, or should I just plant the tuber?

Take cuttings and root, if possible. Pot the tuber and assess its growth. If tuber has rot, cut out the rot. Pot six weeks before and assess. Cuttings do not rot in the spring rain.

How long do you keep seedlings and cuttings on a heat pad and with a dome over them?

Wait until rooted before removing the dome. Spray twice daily. Keep on heat pad 3 – 4 days until rooted.

Do you recommend fluorescent or LED grow lights?

LED full-spectrum are OK, but LED are not needed. Florescent T8 are good. Both work well. LED are more expensive, but more efficient.

Have a problem with cuttings. The stems turning black with all the leaves wilted laying in the potting soil. This happens as early as 3 days after planted. This happens to approximately 25% of them. The cuttings are potted when they are 3" to 4" high rarely with less than 3 leaves. They are grown in my crawl space with the temperatures around 69 -72 degrees. Have use various types of potting trays. probably the least amount of loss is when I use a plastic cup to root or a small pot with a clear plastic cup over it.

The soil is too wet. Too much heat and humidity.

PLANTING

Who do you use for a soil test? How often do you perform a soil test? What are the most important things to look at on soil test results?

A & L Great Lakes Laboratory and Logan Labs in Ohio. Test every couple of years at the end of the season. Take sample from root zone, not the surface. Look at Ph level and N, P, and K.

How many tubers do you plant vs cuttings?

Jim: about 50:50

Kevin: may try more cuttings

David: 100% cuttings

When is the best time to plant, so the blooms will be ready for the shows?

Start with show date and count backwards depending on the variety and bloom size / form. Stagger lateral management to every five days for multiple bloom shows. Nominally, plan on 55 days for B and BB. Plan on 90 days, nominally, for larger varieties and heavier blooms

What spacing do you use when planting? How do you recommend staking dahlias?

Can plant as close as 18" IF laterals are limited.

What do you think about putting bone meal in the planting hole?

No experience with bone meal for dahlias

Do you think that using urea early in the season influences tuber health?

Do use early in the season. This is 45-0-0. Once a year after plants are established One teaspoon per plant. Rake it in. Do not let it touch the plant.

What do you think about adding chicken manure in the planting hole?

No experience with chicken manure.

Do you recommend using mycorrhizae when planting in garden?

Jim: no success using it

David: Have used it. Saw no difference.

Better soil management produces the desired mycorrhizae.

Do you mulch plants? If so, what type of mulch? How do you keep tools sterilized when working in the garden and make sure you aren't getting bleach on your clothes?

David: Yes. 2 – 4". Shredded leaf compost within a few weeks of planting.

Kevin: Do not use mulch; no time to do it.

Jim: No mulch. Pests are attracted to it. Too much water retention.

Re bleach: Use two jars – one with bleach solution, one with dish detergent. Dip in bleach and then in soap to minimize damage to clothes. However, wear old clothes.

GROWING

How do you amend your soil and when do you fertilize? What products do you use? What other products do you use throughout the season for pest and disease control?

Amend: aluminum sulfate, urea, foliage spray late in the season

Disease: sticker spreader to keep treatment on foliage longer. Use miticides, Talstar P, Avid, Forbid, Hort oil, and Sevin

What are some options for pest control that don't hurt butterflies and bees?

Spray during times when these are not active. Stylet oil

STORING / WINTER

I used cedar and pine bedding to store my dahlia tubers. Can this be reused next year and/or put into my compost bin?

Do not reuse – may be diseased. One suggestion, mulch walkways

What are your best tips for successfully storing tubers?

Process: dig, wash, divide, dry, pack

Make sure the tubers are not wet – will cause rot.

If you can write the name on the tuber with marker, it is NOT too wet.

Saran wrap method. Cedar bedding chips. Some use cinnamon or sulfur either on cuts or, in one case, shake tubers in a paper bag to coat.

Do you plant a cover crop on your dahlia beds? If yes, what do you plant? When do you plant and cut it back/dig it in?

Jim: no cover crop

Kevin: once used clover

David: tubers taken out late. Too late to plant cover crop

Do you hybridize Dahlias? If yes, which Dahlias are better for hybridizing?

Jim: trying seedlings this year

Do you collect Dahlia Seeds? If yes, which month is the best to collect seeds?

David: late in the season at the end of September. Not when wet

Kevin: collected seeds for experimentation.

Jim: not many blooms at end of the year to produce seeds. So, not really collecting

GENERAL

What new goal or challenge do you have in 2022 for growing dahlias?

David: raised beds to grow seedlings and plants

Jim: trying to get new members to exhibit. Also, to assist Ms. Kassner to expand her showings



If you could only grow one dahlia, which one would you choose?

Whichever gets me to the honors table.

Some of the harder to obtain varieties.

OTHER COMMENTS FROM THE Q & A

David: limits tilling, resorts to hand turning of the soil

Remove posts?

David and Jim – yes. Kevin – left in this year

Osmocote at planting?

Jim uses on the surface. Either the 10-10-10 or the 14-14-14

“Best” varieties?

Check ADS Classification Guide. Shows number of ribbons by variety for various regions of U.S.
Look at ADS “cream of the crop”