

### **Mike's Dahlia Care Cliff Notes... works for me... hope it works for you!**

- Updated 05.03.26, questions: call (630) 632-1701 email [mikecsds@gmail.com](mailto:mikecsds@gmail.com)

### **Other information sources:**

- American Dahlia Society; <https://www.dahlia.org/>
- Central States Dahlia Society; local to the Chicago Suburbs: <https://www.centralstatesdahliasociety.com/>
- All products listed below, for the most part are readily available at Ace, Lowes, etc. I tried to make hyper links to the retailers... but they fail when converting to pdf, so the links are for the most part Amazon.

### **Stronger Roots in Pots; link to Dahlia Doctor article:**

<https://www.dahlia doctor.com/blogs/second-blog/potting-pinching-dahlias>

### **Planting the Dahlias:**

Plant in full sun or at least 6-8 hours of full sun. Plant the last full weekend in May if ground is warm. You can plant as late as mid-July... blooms appear in a about 4-6 weeks and will continue until killer frost.

- **Spacing:** Before planting (or shortly thereafter) install posts to support the plants later in season. Space post 30" to 36" apart, I use 8' long ½" diameter rebar. Using a [post driver](#), drive the posts into ground so top of the posts are about 6'-0" above the ground. Another option is metal "T" [fence posts](#) (Home Depot or Lowes have those for about \$8 each).
- **Hole Size:** Dig hole for the Dahlia:
  - If your Dahlia is on a Tuber, dig hole deep enough so top of tuber is 4" to 6" below the top of the soil.
  - If your Dahlia is a cutting, dig hole deep enough to cover bottom two pair of leaves; strip the leaves before filling hole... roots will develop from the axils - the joint where the leaves meet the main stem
- **Prep Soil in Hole:** In bottom of hole add 1 tablespoon [Osmacote](#) plant food and ½ cup [Epsoma Organic Plant Tone Flower Fertilizer](#), one tablespoon [Mycorrhizae](#) and stir with dirt in hole
- **Dip Plant in Water:** Before removing Dahlia from pot, dip it into a bucket of water mixed with half strength [Miracle Gro](#) or other diluted fertilizer and soak a second or two.
- **Tease Roots:** Remove Dahlia from pot, tease the roots to loosen them from the soil.
- **Rotate the Plan:** Plant Dahlia in moist soil, but be sure to *rotate the plant so that the leaves are at an angle to the post*, see photo in following pages.
- **Fertilize once in ground:** After planting spread 1 tablespoon of [Osmacote](#) around the base of the plant and work into the soil, water about 5 seconds.

### **Maintenance: Slugs, Disease and Insect control:**

- **Slug Control** on a regular schedule, starting about two weeks after planting. I use [Ortho Bug-Geta](#); they are pellets, apply around the base in the evening, do not water. Once plants grow tall enough remove bottom leaves that touch ground... easy access for slugs (also good for air circulation around base of plants).
- **Disease and other Insects**, starting about three weeks after planting (to alternate with Slug control). I use [Bio-Advanced 3-in-1 Insect, Disease and Mite Control](#). There are many other options too, the main thing is to stop insects and disease before it starts. Especially Powdery Mildew, a white coating on leaves... don't wait for it to happen. I supplement the Bio-Advance with [Bonide Copper Fungicide](#). You can purchase either premixed spray bottles or concentrate

bottles for use with a hose or your [garden sprayer](#) (this link is to the sprayer I recently purchased... well, similar... mine is 8 gallon with 10' FLEXIBLE hose, the link is 9 gallon, 15' hose... and I emphasize FLEXIBLE hose! Big tires too, very steady on bumpy ground).

- **Fertilize:** Apply fertilizer every two weeks in the a.m. I use [Vigor](#) or [FoxFarm](#) as they both fertilize and provide nutrition to the soil. For weakening, late-season dahlias (late August/September), use a zero-nitrogen (0-10-10) or low-nitrogen fertilizer (such as 5-10-10 or superphosphate) to boost tuber strength and bloom longevity without pushing weak, leafy growth. Avoid nitrogen entirely in late autumn to prevent rot in storage
- **Potash:** [Potash](#) (potassium) is essential for dahlias to promote strong stem growth, vibrant blooms, and healthy tuber development. High-potash fertilizers, such as tomato feed, or supplements like sulphate of potash should be applied when plants are growing (approx. 12 inches high) and every 4-5 weeks during blooming. Avoid high-nitrogen, which produces foliage rather than flowers
- **Tying Plants as they grow:** As the plants get taller, tether them to the posts with [Jute twine](#). The blooms become top heavy and need support on windy and rainy days!
- **Watering:** 5 seconds per plant at beginning of the season, then 10 seconds per plant when get larger... that's it! Maybe a bit more in hotter climates; but Dahlias do not like "wet feet".  
**Drooping On Hot Days:** They do not need water. Dahlias droop in the heat (usually over 85-90°F) because they lose water through their leaves faster than roots can pull it from the soil, causing a temporary, natural reduction in hydraulic pressure within their hollow stems. This is a survival mechanism to conserve water, commonly called "midday wilt." They often perk up automatically by evening. If they do not perk up, then adding some water may be in order.
- **Insecticide Cocktail:** For tough insects such as mites, etc. they can be mitigated using professional grade components, no more than once every two months (links below are to various websites; can also visit Sun Spot Supply website for all the following products, \$450.55 + tax, free shipping):
  - **[Talstar P:](#) Professional Insecticide.**
    - **2 tablespoons per gallon**, \$40/pint at Walmart (did not find it on Amazon), shelf life: 3-5 years once opened, store in cool, dry place.
  - **[Clearys 3336f:](#) Broad-spectrum, systemic fungicide.**
    - **1.5 teaspoons per gallon**, \$44/pint at DIY Pest Control ([Amazon \\$78](#) per quart). 3-year shelf life from the date of purchase when stored in a cool, dry place away from extreme temperatures. For maximum effectiveness, the product should be used within a reasonable timeframe, and once mixed with water, it should be applied within 24 hours
  - **[Avid 0.15 EC:](#) Miticide and insecticide.**
    - **0.5 teaspoon per gallon**, \$98/pint at Walmart ([Amazon \\$79](#)), while no formal expiration date is often listed, the product remains stable for 3-5 years under ideal conditions.
  - **[Forbid:](#) Miticide and insecticide.**
    - **0.25 teaspoon per gallon**, \$263/pint at Forestry Distributing (\$343 at Walmart, [\\$295 Amazon](#)). shelf life of 2 to 3 years from the date of purchase or manufacture when stored in a cool, dry location away from extreme temperatures. Proper storage is crucial; some sources indicate up to 5 years from manufacture if stored under ideal conditions
  - **Spreader Sticker Surfactant:** This is a biodegradable; non-ionic surfactant concentrate that enhances the effectiveness of lawn and garden sprays increasing adhesion to foliage.
    - **1 tablespoon per gallon**, \$10/pint at Southern States ([Amazon Substitute \\$14/quart](#)), typical shelf life of 3 to 4 years when stored properly.

**Pinching/Stripping/How many laterals to allow when starting in spring and then top (see yellow pages with pinching and # of laterals to keep):**

- **Pinching plants:** Pinching stops vertical growth and encourages the lateral growth. Laterals grow from the axils - the joint where the leaves meet the main stem
- **Pinch Timing:** Timing is based on your preference: If you just want blooms sooner than later or if you are timing for Shows... we encourage show participation...
- **Plant ready to Pinch:** A plant is ready to print when it has the number of leaf pairs below, or based on Show timing:
  - **AA:** keep 3 to 4 pairs of leaves and then keep 3-4 laterals during growing season (one per pair, alternating side of stem).
  - **A:** keep 4 to 6 pairs of leaves and then keep 4-6 laterals...
  - **B:** keep 6 to 7 pairs of leaves and then keep 6-7 laterals
  - **BB:** keep 7-9 pairs of leaves and then keep 7-9 laterals
  - **Balls, Minis and Singles:** Keep 7-9.... Or as many as you want pairs of leaves and allow all laterals to grow.
- **Strip:** Once the plant becomes more established, you will need to strip excess foliage. Any foliage within 18" of the ground should be removed, then remove foliage above as necessary to allow decent air flow within the plants. Good air flow helps prevent powdery mildew.
- Link to American Dahlia Society Grooming: <https://dahlia.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Grooming.pdf>

**Early/Mid-Season Bed Prep; Many methods:**

This point for discussion: If needed, treat the beds with some sort of mulch. In the past I have Spread 2-3 inches **Spent Mushroom Manure** (per Frank Campise, not the fake stuff from Home Depot) mid to late June (or 3-4 weeks after planting or when ground is dry enough... 2015 late July!). Source for the "real thing" but not sure if they are still selling this product.

Prestige Landscaping, 28W761 Army Trail Rd, West Chicago IL 60185  
P: 630-289-4868 (Note for me: Ordered 2 yards in 2013)

**Disbudding (see yellow page with disbudding sketch):**

- Buds will start to grow on the ends of the laterals; there will be three, two of which will be removed. Keep the center bud and remove the two side buds by simply pinching them off when they are large enough to easily "snap off". This allows more energy to go to the bud which will bloom.
- Then remove both laterals on the next pair of leaves below the bud.
- Remove one lateral on the second pair of leaves below the bud, leaving the other which will grow to become the next bloom.
- Leave both laterals on all the pairs of leaves below the second pair.
- Disbud on a regular basis and keep tethering the plant to the stake as it grows taller.

**Killer Frost:**

- Frost KILLS Dahlias; they are filled with water so when they predict the "Killer Frost" for the season go and cut all the flowers and bring them inside for the last blooms of the season.
- Chicago NW Suburb's average Killer Frost is October 26<sup>th</sup>.
- 2012 was 11.09.12, 2013 was 10.21.13, 2014 was 11.01.14... I haven't documented them since...

**See my other presentation for Tuber Digging/Dividing/Storing directions. Thanks for your time!**

Dahlia ready to be planted  
into ground



I dig a hole the size of the pot, plant tuber plants so that the tuber is 4" - 6" below the surface (squirrels will dig up tubers if they are too shallow). Cuttings, about 2" deep. Sprinkle in Plant Tone, Osmocote and Mycorrhizae.



Dip the plant (still in th pot) into a bucket of water with fertilizer mix, I use Miracle Gro... since it is the "easy way" to go.



Then let the plant drain the excess water for a minute or two.



Plant the Dahlia in the ground close to the post, rotate the Dahlia so the leaves are at an angle to the post.

"Post"





"Post"

Plant the Dahlia in the ground close to the post, rotate the Dahlia so the leaf are at an angle to the post.



06.11.14, one week after planting. Far bed is all Dahlias, near bed they are at the bottom of the posts.



07.01.14



08.21.14: Plenty of blooms, start cutting the nice ones to bring inside or give away!



09.26.14



10.29.14: Cut the blooms... frost is coming! See next page...



10.29.14... last "Harvest"



11.02.14... frost last night... they just die!!



Honor table at 2018 CSDS Show, Chicago Botanic Garden... I have a few up there!



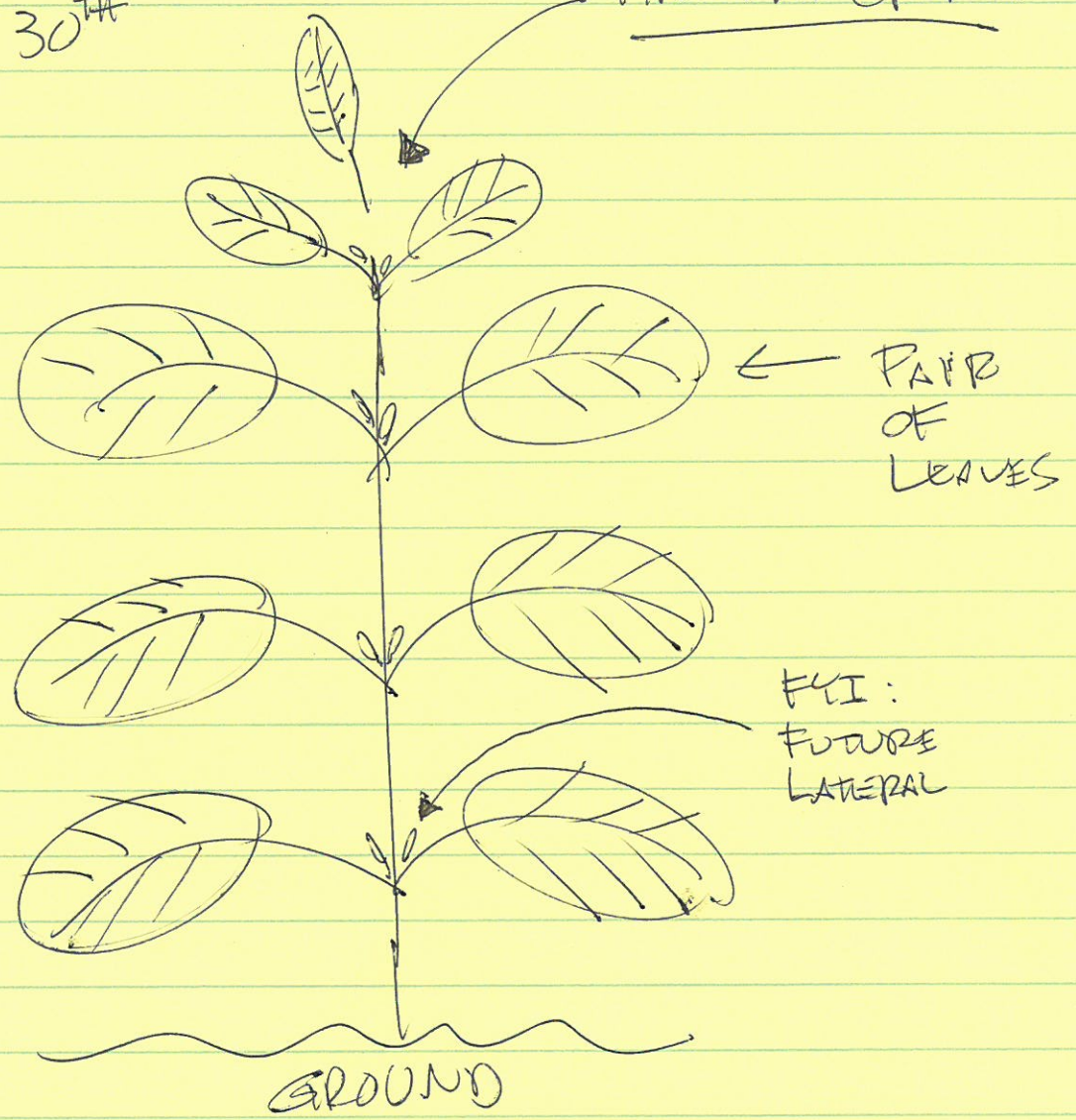
Tubers just dug up

LIFETIME

CENTRAL STEM  
PINCHING

JUNE 15<sup>TH</sup> - 30<sup>TH</sup>

CENTRAL STEM  
PINCH AT CROTCH



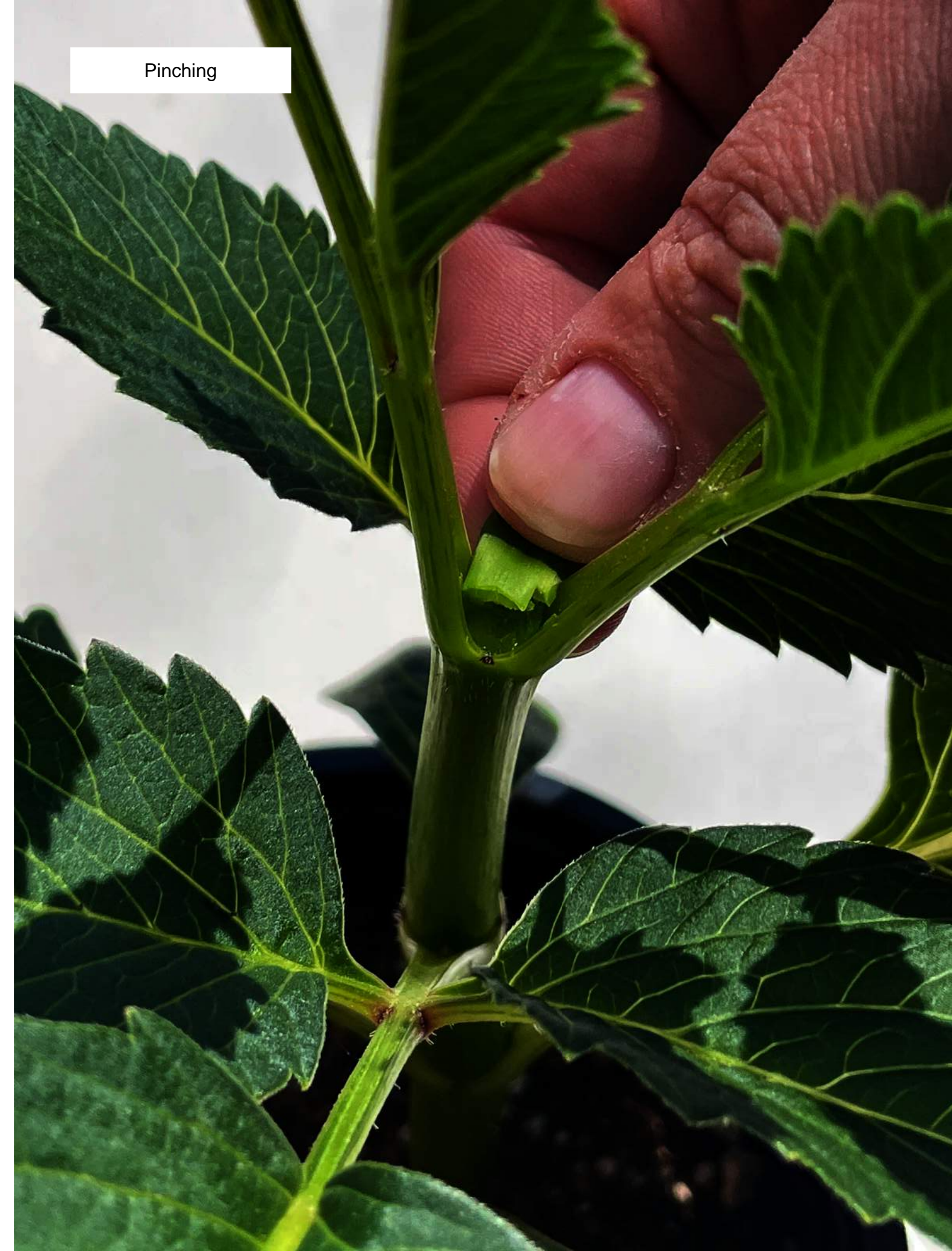
PINCH CENTRAL STEM OFF BETWEEN JUNE  
15<sup>TH</sup> - 30<sup>TH</sup>. KEEP THE FOLLOWING  
# OF PAIRS OF LEAVES:

- (AA) : 3-4 PAIRS      (B) : 6-7 PAIRS
- (A) : 4-6 PAIRS      (BB) : 7-9 PAIRS

Pinching



Pinching

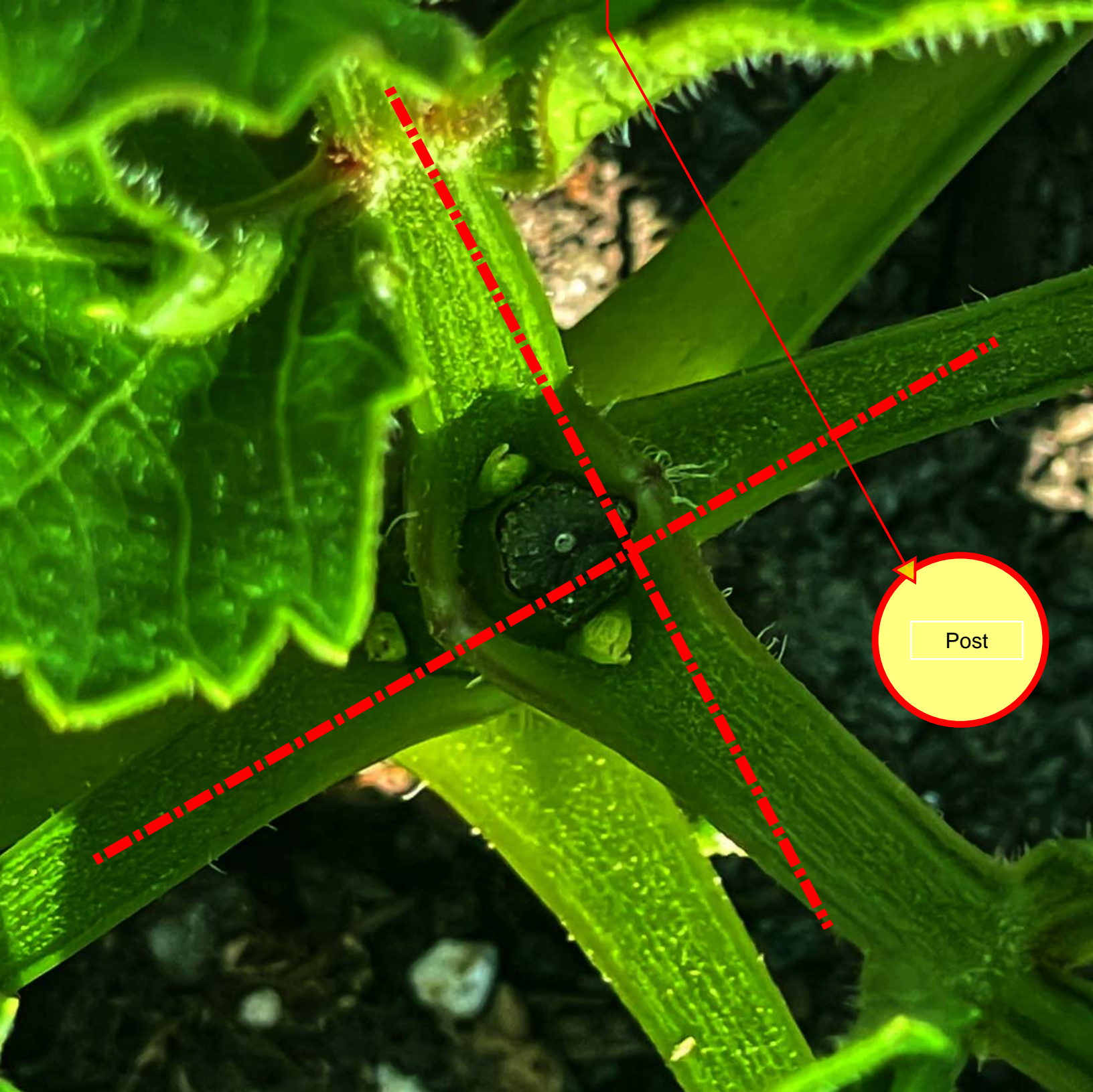


Pinching



Pinching and Plant Orientation to Post

Orient plant at an "angle" to the post so that leaves do not grow toward the post.



Post

Pinching

Tie off plant to post,  
need stability for  
heavy blooms,  
especially after rains



Pinching



Pinching

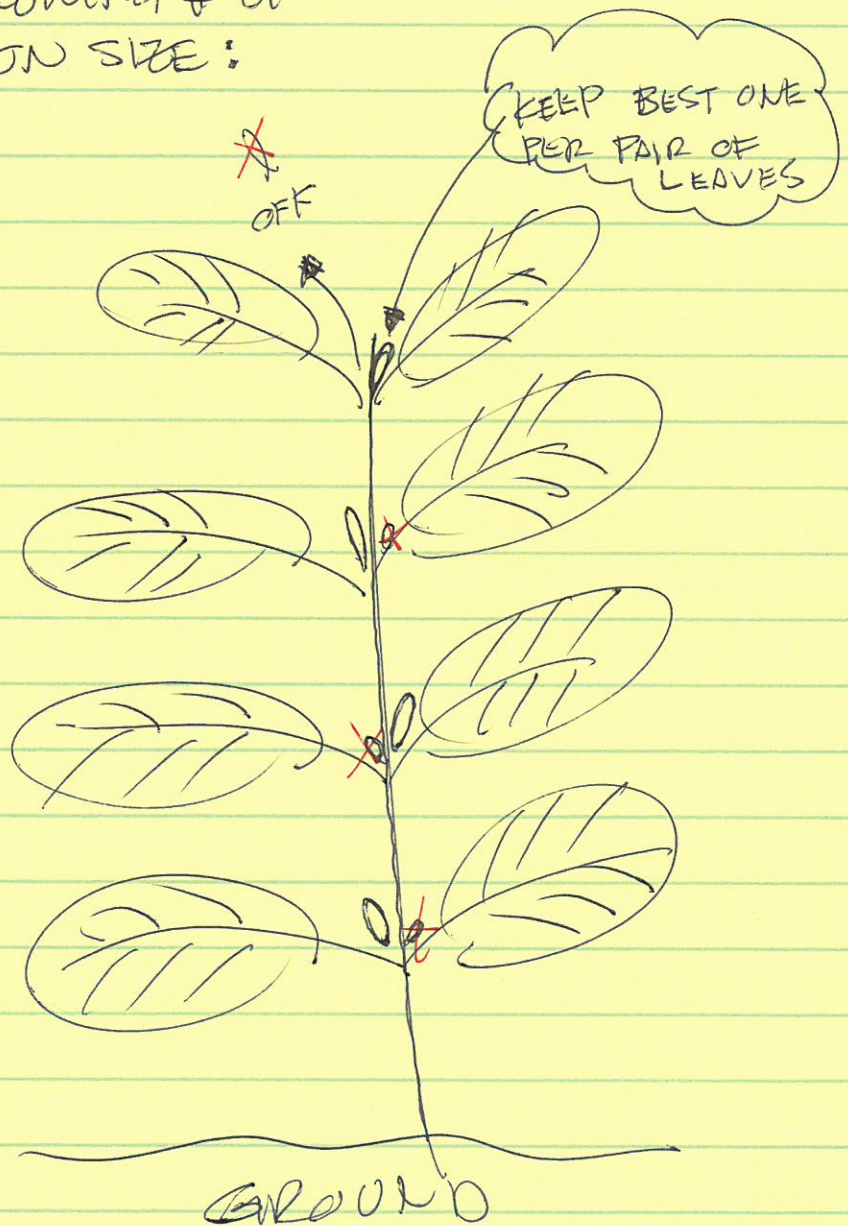


AFTER PINCH CENTRAL STEM...

# OF LATERALS TO KEEP | JUNE / EARLY JULY

AFTER PINCHING CENTRAL STEM,  
ALLOW LATERALS TO GROW FOR A  
BIT. THEN PINCH OFF WEAKER  
LATERAL @ EACH PAIR OF LEAVES,  
LEAVING THE FOLLOWING # OF  
LATERALS BASED ON SIZE:

- (AA) - 3
- (A) - 4-5
- (B) - 5-6
- (BB) - 6-8



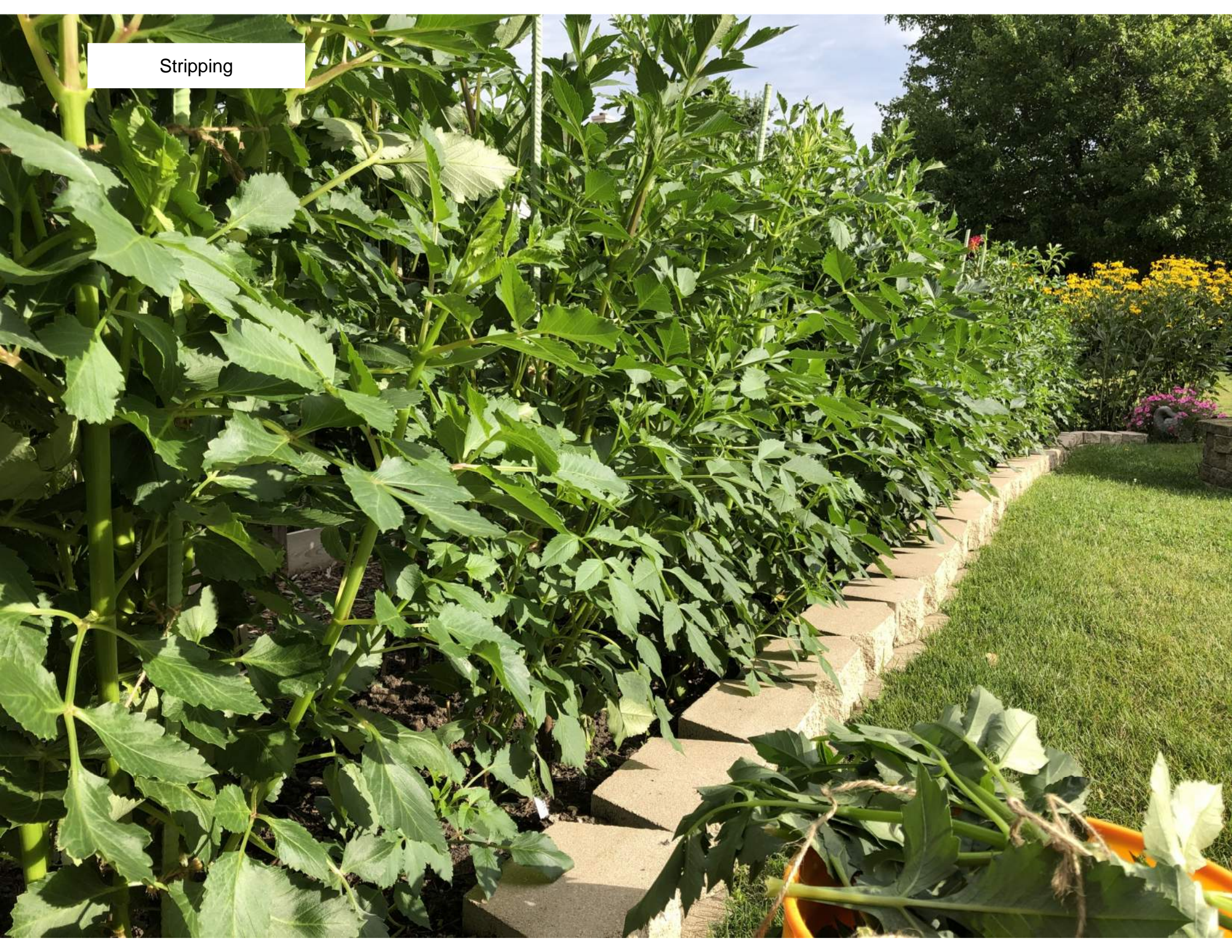
Stripping



Stripping



Stripping



Stripping



Lateral Management



Lateral Management,  
(Show before/after  
Lateral Management  
Movie)



# Lateral Management



1

2

3

Lateral Management



Lateral Management



Lateral Management

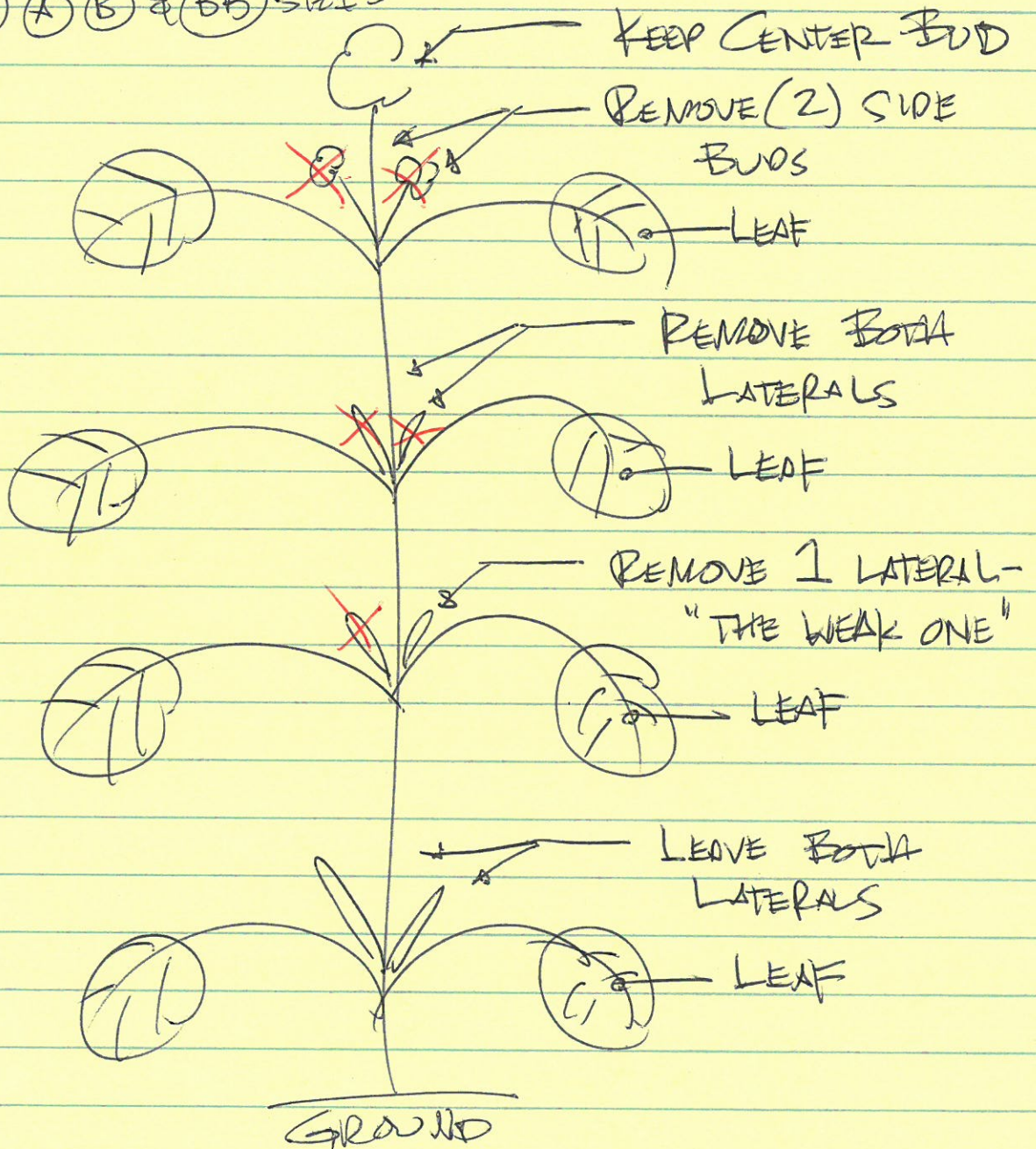


JULY ONWARD - NOW THAT CENTRAL STEM REMOVED & LATERALS AT THE DESIRED # FOR THE DAHLIA - BUDS WILL DEVELOP ON EACH LATERAL - TIME TO DISBUD!!

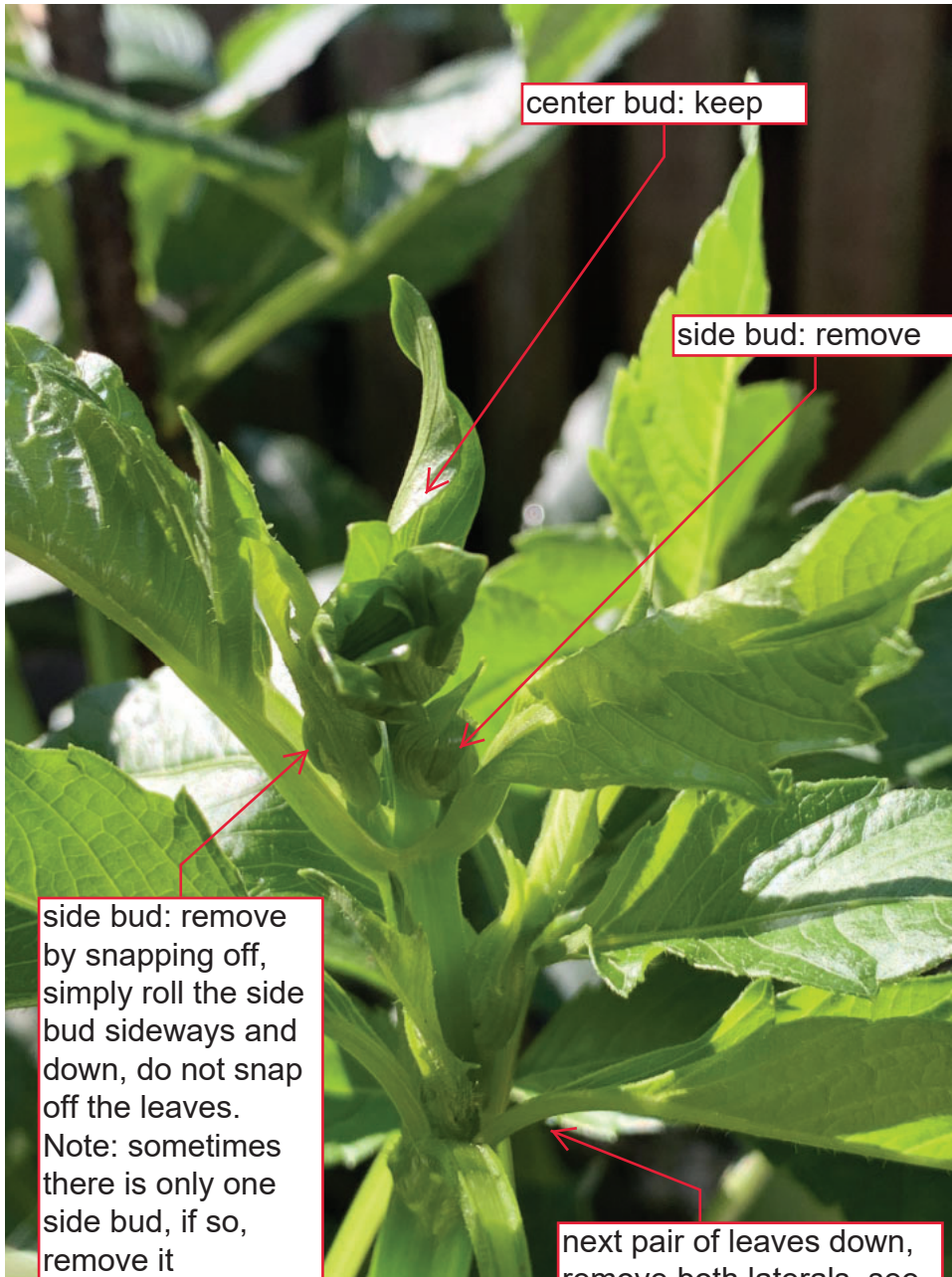
# DISBUDDING

CONTINUOUS

(AA) (A) (B) & (BB) SIZES



Before Disbudding



center bud: keep

side bud: remove

side bud: remove by snapping off, simply roll the side bud sideways and down, do not snap off the leaves. Note: sometimes there is only one side bud, if so, remove it

next pair of leaves down, remove both laterals, see next page.

After Disbudding



side buds removed

Before removing  
Lateral on next pair of  
leaves below bud

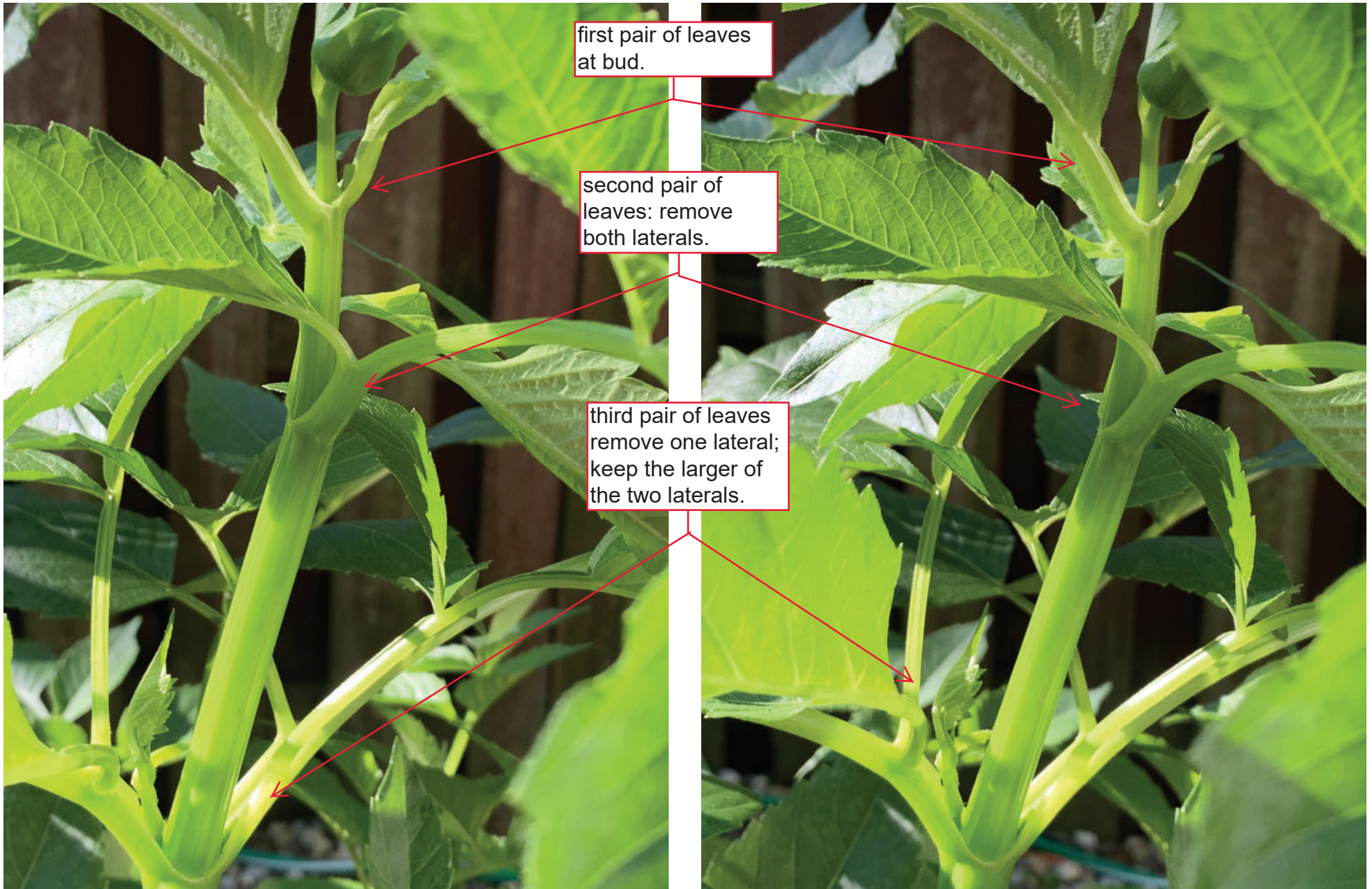


laterals: remove by snapping off,  
simply roll the side bud sideways and  
down, do not snap off the leaves.

After removing Lateral  
on next pair of leaves  
below bud



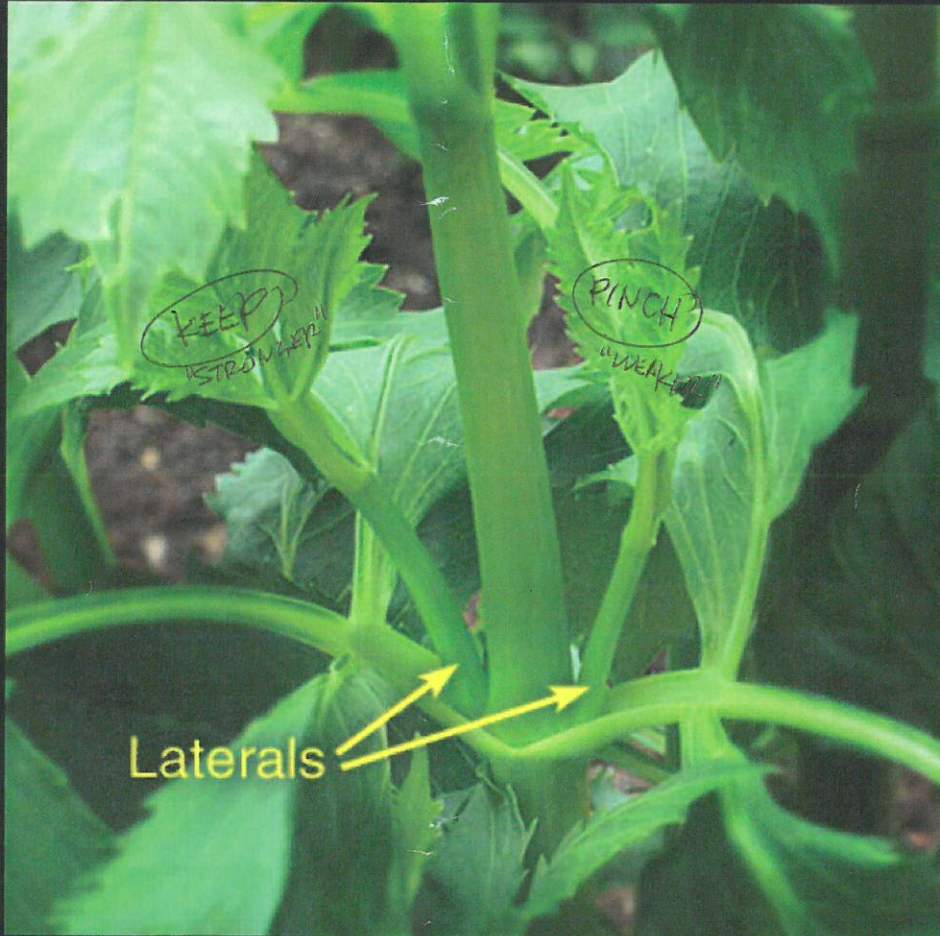
laterals removed



first pair of leaves  
at bud.

second pair of  
leaves: remove  
both laterals.

third pair of leaves  
remove one lateral;  
keep the larger of  
the two laterals.



Mid Island Dahlia Society, Learning Center

[midislanddahlia.com](http://midislanddahlia.com)

400 x 400



# Average time for Dahlia buds to open

ALTITUDE - Approx. 1800 feet above sea level

Day shade temperature - very often 80 - 85 degrees Fahrenheit

Humidity - Unusually high for much of the trial period

N.B. - The expression "bracts" below refers to the green leaf-like involucral bracts surrounding the bud. The term "baby bud" is when the involucral bracts enclose the bud. The term "pea bud" is when the involucral bracts have opened and exposed the bud within.

CONDITION OF TERMINAL BUD	DAYS TO MATURITY
Baby bud visible within true leaves which are more or less upright	22 to 26 days
Baby bud emerging from or just free of true leaves	20 to 22 days
Baby bud enlarged but still entirely covered by bracts	17 to 19 days
Small pea bud visible within bracts	16 to 18 days
Big pea bud partly covered by bracts	13 to 16 days
Bracts upright but touching bud at sides	11 to 16 days
Bracts beginning to open out flat or are flat	10 to 11 days
Tinge of color or petals loosening at center	7 to 9 days
Colored petals loosening at center	6 to 7 days
1 to 5 petals lifting up straight	6 days
Several petals upright or at 45 degrees or some flat	5 days
Petals upright or outer row of petals flat	4 days
Nearly open or half open or some petals flat	3 days
Nearly open	2 days
Fully open	1 day
Mature	Pick the winner

The above figures are average under the above conditions. Probably it will be necessary to add 10% to 20% or more under cooler or dull conditions.

## Timing of Show Blooms

Cut Back or Pinch Out On Dates Shown to Have Blooms Ready for Listed Shows

Bloom Size	Cut Back Days	August 23, 2026	August 27, 2026	September 5, 2026	September 12, 2026	September 19, 2026	October 4, 2025
		Elkhart	West Michigan ADS National	Southtown	Southeast Michigan	Central States	place holder
AA	66	June 18, 2026	June 22, 2026	July 1, 2026	July 8, 2026	July 15, 2026	July 30, 2025
A	60	June 24, 2026	June 28, 2026	July 7, 2026	July 14, 2026	July 21, 2026	August 5, 2025
B	48	July 6, 2026	July 10, 2026	July 19, 2026	July 26, 2026	August 2, 2026	August 17, 2025
BB	42	July 12, 2026	July 16, 2026	July 25, 2026	August 1, 2026	August 8, 2026	August 23, 2025
Min	38	July 16, 2026	July 20, 2026	July 29, 2026	August 5, 2026	August 12, 2026	August 27, 2025
Bloom Size	Pea Size Bud Days	August 23, 2026 Elkhart	August 27, 2026 West Michigan	September 5, 2026 Southtown	September 12, 2026 Southeast Michigan	September 19, 2026 Central States	October 4, 2025 place holder
AA	28	July 26, 2026	July 30, 2026	August 8, 2026	August 15, 2026	August 22, 2026	September 6, 2025
A	28	July 26, 2026	July 30, 2026	August 8, 2026	August 15, 2026	August 22, 2026	September 6, 2025
B	24	July 30, 2026	August 3, 2026	August 12, 2026	August 19, 2026	August 26, 2026	September 10, 2025
BB	20	August 3, 2026	August 7, 2026	August 16, 2026	August 23, 2026	August 30, 2026	September 14, 2025
Min	18	August 5, 2026	August 9, 2026	August 18, 2026	August 25, 2026	September 1, 2026	September 16, 2025

