

*Southeastern Michigan Dahlia Society*  
*presents:*

# Starting Dahlia Tubers Indoors



## Planting Outdoors

## Care After Planting

# PART 1

## Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

Get a head start on the growing season

# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

When to bring your tubers out of storage

One of the most asked questions is:

**Q: “When do I need to bring my tubers out of storage?”**

**A: “It depends”**

My question to you

- 1) Are you planning on taking cuttings?
- 2) Are you going to pot up tubers indoors?
- 3) Are you going to plant tubers directly in the ground?



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## When to bring your tubers out of storage

Recommended timing is just an **estimate**. You can shift earlier or later depending on your growing conditions

Activity	Taking Cuttings	Potting Tubers to Start Plants Indoors	Planting tubers directly in the ground
Bring tubers out of cold storage	March 1 <sup>st</sup> 2-4 weeks before potting	March 30 <sup>th</sup> 7-14 days before potting	April 30 <sup>th</sup> 10-14 days before planting
Start potting	March 15 <sup>th</sup> - March 30 <sup>th</sup>	April 7 <sup>th</sup> - April 14 <sup>th</sup>	<del></del>
Plant in ground	May 15 <sup>th</sup> - June 1 <sup>st</sup>	May 15 <sup>th</sup> - June 1 <sup>st</sup>	May 10 <sup>th</sup> - May 15 <sup>th</sup>
Watering tips	Water after planting & regularly after. Don't let plant dry out.	Water lightly after planting & wait 1-2 weeks to water regularly. Overwatering can cause the tuber to rot.	Water lightly after planting & wait until green growth appears before watering regularly. Overwatering can cause the tuber to rot.

*Did you know?*

- *Dahlias absorb water through their roots. When planting tubers directly in the ground you want them to develop roots first before you begin regular watering to avoid rot.*
- *When planting a dahlia plant from a cutting you must water regularly because there is not a tuber to rely on for energy.*
- *There are exceptions to every rule... If May and June weather is extremely dry you may have to water more often.*

Average last frost for Troy, Michigan is May 1 – May 10  
Average last frost for Howell, Michigan is May 11 – May 20



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## When to bring your tubers out of storage

- ▶ Many gardeners start tubers indoors to get a jump on the season
- ▶ Target planting in pots about 6 weeks prior to planting outdoors
- ▶ In Southeastern Michigan the last frost is typically sometime early to mid May. We suggest you begin to warm up your tubers at the end of March.
- ▶ Bring tubers in from cold storage and let them acclimate for 1-2 weeks at 65° - 70°F
- ▶ If your tubers are in clumps and there are multiple sprouts, now is the time to divide
  - ▶ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0icqxGVnOII> Dividing tubers



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## Bring your tubers out of winter storage



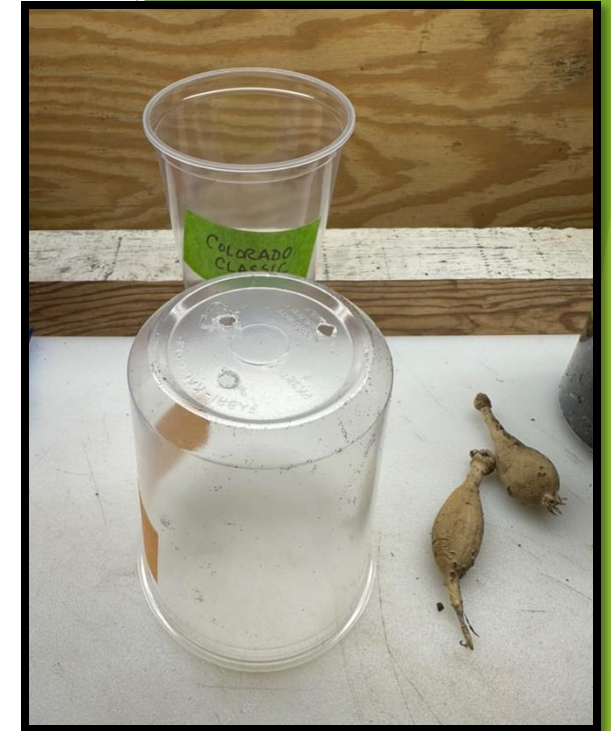
- ▶ Supplies you will need:
  - ▶ LC1 professional growing mix - sungro is a recommended brand carried by Telly's Greenhouse. Avoid soil with fertilizer.
  - ▶ Individual pots [garden pots, Gordon Foods quart deli containers]
    - The reason many of us like the quart deli containers is because you can see both the green growth of the plant and the roots.
  - ▶ Shallow plastic tray
  - ▶ Labels



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## Prepare to plant in individual pots

- ▶ Moisten your soil mix. I mix soil and water in a 5-gallon bucket to achieve the correct moisture level.
  - ▶ You don't want the soil too wet. Moisten until the soil holds together when you squeeze in your hand. If water drips from soil it is too wet.
- ▶ If you are using quart deli containers or other recycled containers for pots make sure you drill holes for drainage
  - ▶ Yogurt, cottage cheese, sour cream containers can be the right size to pot tubers



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## Plant in individual pots

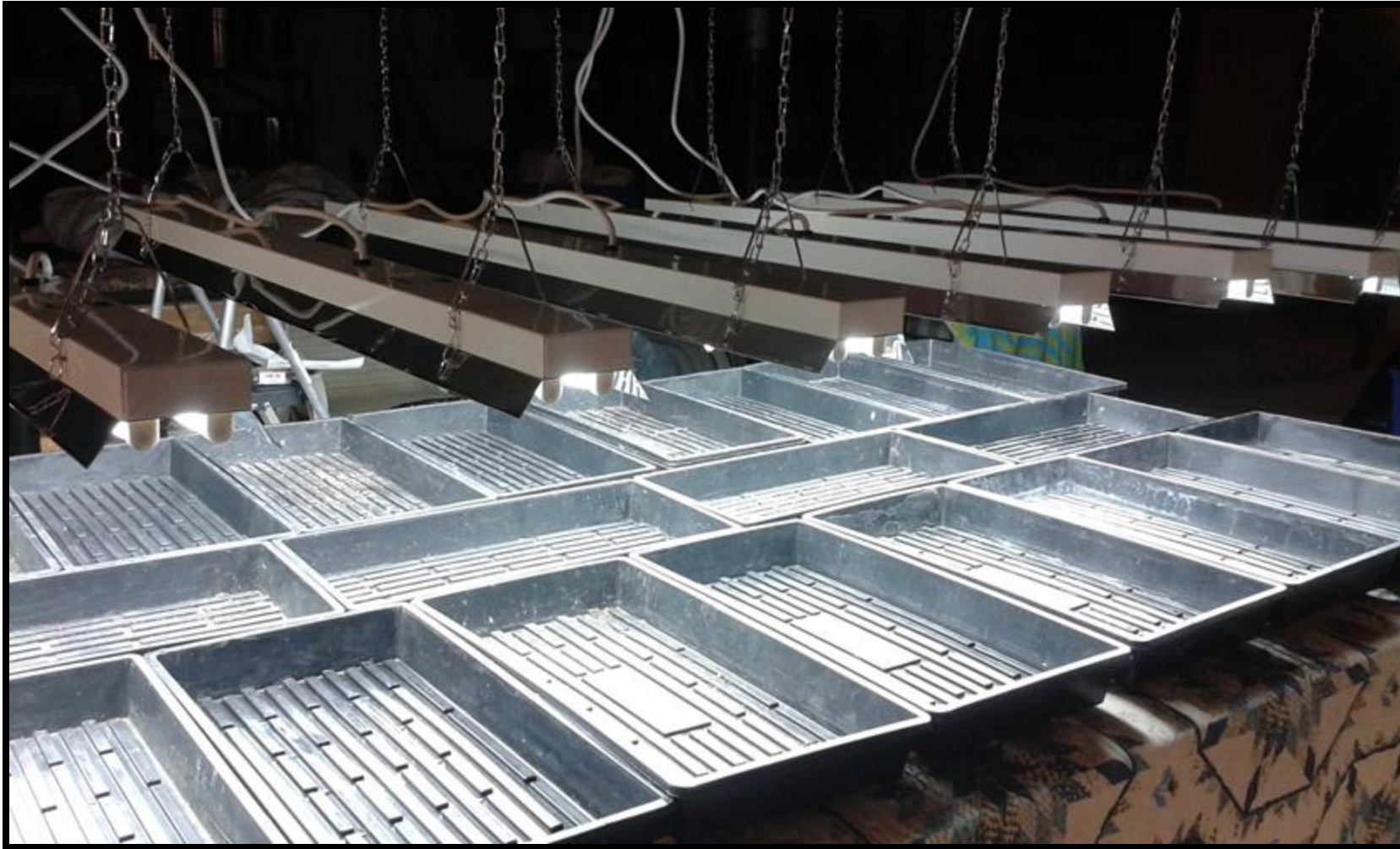
- ▶ Place the soil in pot sized to hold the tuber. Make sure pot has drainage holes.
- ▶ Plant as you would in the ground with eye pointing up with crown at soil level.
  - ▶ Don't forget to label pots/plants
- ▶ Place pots in a bright, sunny location. Grow lights and shop lights work the best.





# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

Plant in individual pots



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## Let your tubers warm up

- ▶ Pot up the tubers with clear eyes and/or sprouts first
  - ▶ Don't panic - some varieties take a really long time to sprout
- ▶ For the tubers still waiting for sprouts lay them in moistened soil
  - ▶ Make sure tubers are clearly labeled [tags, permanent marker, ink pencil]
- ▶ Place in warm area to allow tubers to sprout and grow roots
  - ▶ 60° - 70°F



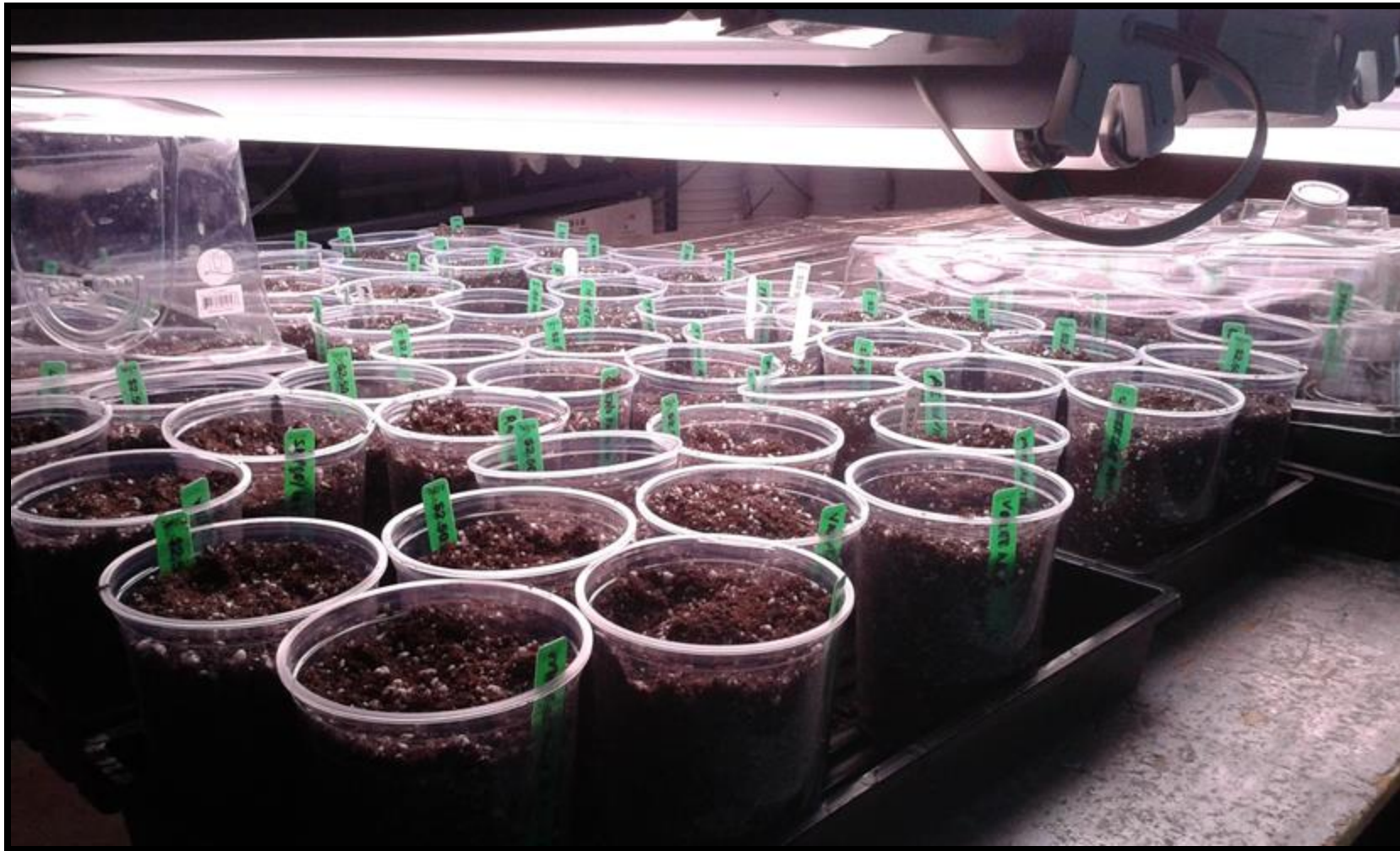
## Time to sort my tubers

- Tubers to pot for my garden
- Tubers to pot for spares
- Tubers to share with friends
- Tubers for SEMDS sale
- Tubers that need more time to sprout



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

Plant in individual pots



# Start Dahlia Tubers Indoors

## Care for your plants

- ▶ Don't water during the first few weeks. Too much water will cause tuber to rot.
- ▶ Your potted tubers will grow stem and roots (deli containers let you see the roots)
- ▶ In the warmer weather of May (in Michigan) you can start to acclimate your plants by moving them outside during the day but bring them back in at night (garage works).
- ▶ Hardening off is the process of gradually acclimating plants started indoors to outdoor conditions. This helps prevent transplant shock.



# PART 2

## Time to Plant Outside

Check out SEMDS YouTube Channel

[Chapter 3 – Planting, Staking, and Topping Dahlias](#)



# Time to Plant Outside

## Prepare to plant

- ▶ Plant in the ground when soil outside is 60° F and there is no chance of frost
- ▶ Dahlias grow best planted in the ground vs. planted in pots.



# Time to Plant Outside

## Prepare to plant

- ▶ Some dahlia growers have had success growing plants in grow bags. Staking is still required for most dahlia varieties.
- ▶ Grow bags have been a great solution for gardens with heavy clay soil. Try 5-10 gallon bags.
- ▶ Excellent tuber production



# Time to Plant Outside

## Prepare to plant

- ▶ Select a planting site with full sun. Dahlias grow more blooms with 6 to 8 hours of direct sunlight.
- ▶ Dahlias thrive in rich, well-drained soil. The pH level of your soil should be 6.5-7.0, slightly acidic.
- ▶ Plant your dahlias 2-3 feet apart
- ▶ Tubers started indoors should be planted with crown below the soil
- ▶ Tubers planted directly in the ground should be planted with the eye facing up, about 6 to 8 inches deep, with crown below soil level





# Time to Plant Outside

## Staking

- ▶ Medium to large flowering dahlias will require support. Place stakes at planting time and tie stems to them as the plants grow. Most dahlias grown for cut flowers reach 4-6 feet so staking is important. Tomato cages and cattle panel can be used for additional support.



# Time to Plant Outside

## Staking



- ▶ Make sure stakes are at least 6' tall
  - 8' works best for tall plants. 2' in the ground, 6' above
  - Note: Gary is 6' tall
- ▶ Use sturdy stakes (5/8" dia. minimum)
  - No whimpy stakes
- ▶ T-post fence posts
- ▶ Try electrical conduit for a sturdy and much lighter alternative



# PART 3

## Care After Planting

# Care after planting

- ▶ Water lightly after planting & wait 1-2 weeks to water regularly. Overwatering can cause the tuber to rot.
  - Wait until the plants are 4-6” tall before watering regularly
- ▶ Do not cover soil with mulch or bark after planting
  - Bark harbors slugs, earwigs, and other insects
  - Mulch can be helpful for moisture control during the heat of summer
- ▶ After dahlias are established, provide a deep watering 2 to 3 times a week.
- ▶ Don't forget to label your plants or make a map of what dahlia variety is planted where so you can keep track of your dahlias. This is good to do if you plan on participating in dahlia exhibitions or sharing your tubers with other growers.



# Time to Plant Outside

## Fertilizing N – P – K (Nitrogen – Phosphorus – Potassium)

- ▶ Dahlias will generally benefit from regular treatments with a water-soluble fertilizer or granular fertilizer
  - ▶ American Dahlia Society suggests treating with a nitrogen fertilizer through the middle of the season and minimize nitrogen at the end of the season
  - ▶ If you plant in rich organic soil and use Osmocote Plus Smart-Release (15-9-12) and worm castings when you plant, you may not need to fertilize for the rest of the season.
  - ▶ Some growers use a Bloom Booster (high phosphorus) in August to improve bloom quality
- Disclaimer: The best strategy for fertilizing is to begin with a soil test to determine specific needs of your soil. You wouldn't want to use a high phosphorus fertilizer if your soil is already too high in phosphorus.



### Other Fertilizer Brands

#### June – July

- Osmocote Plus Smart Release (15-9-12)
- Vigor liquid concentrate (9-2-6)
- Proven Winners water soluble (24-12-17)
- Jack's Classic All Purpose water soluble (20-20-20)
- Bordine's All Purpose water soluble (20-20-20)

#### August – Early September

- Bordine's Bloom Enhancer (10-54-10)



# Dahlias make great cut flowers

Share them with friends

