

LATE SEASON FIELD CUTTINGS

Beginning now until all the dahlia clumps are brown and dry, I like to take cuttings. Until I dig up a clump, I cannot know how many tubers have been produced; but I can take cuttings as extra “insurance” in case something befalls the tubers at any stage of their growth. So Field Cuttings can increase the stock of rare varieties. Field cuttings might be the only way of insuring continuation of terrible tuber producers like Porcelain or Belle of the Ball. Late season field cuttings can also produce stock for early planting and thus produce early blooms. Last year we had first double blossoms the end of April! So longed for and so lovely.

I look for new green sprigs along the fat lower stalk or the larger branches of a plant. I prefer at least 4 sets of leaves. Cleverer dahlianners can work magic with only 3 sets, but I prefer 4. I gently apply pressure to extricate the sprout off the stalk without breaking either the stalk or the sprig.



Sometimes I'm lucky and there are two.



I remove the bottom sets of leaves until I have only 1-2 or 3 sets left.

I prefer 1"x1" plastic containers about 3" tall. For some reason, new roots seem to like to feel tight and "know" where the edges are. Our brilliant cutting crew (Lou, Devi, Pat and Tinnee) put their tuber cuttings directly into 4"x4's; but they have a heated greenhouse and misting rooms. I use a very "light" potting medium: lots of vermiculite, perlite, and rich composted soil.



I pack 6 of my little 1x1's into a half gallon milk carton. That way I can let a little water pool at the bottom to keep the humidity high. Other growers make little mini-greenhouses with chop sticks and plastic bags. I might try an experiment and see if it enhances growth?

I put everything in my unheated 6'x8' greenhouse under shop lights, on a timer for 18-20 hours a day. The dahlias think it's Midsummer Night's Eve every night!! I spritz with water and highly diluted balanced fertilizer.



Over time, new leaves will put forth; wee hair roots will develop. Sometimes I use a plastic fork to hold the shoot aloft until it builds up the strength to do so by itself.



After about a month, the cuttings will develop both new leaves and wee hair roots.



When it seems that the entire 1x1 is full of new roots, I transfer it to a 4"x4". I use a denser medium of highly composted soil. I let these stay under the lights until they are too tall for my apparatus. Then they go outside to an area exposed to lots of light but protected from the wind. They are ready to be planted in the ground or to graduate to gallon sized pots to grow even more robust roots before their "forever" plots.



Try it. It's fun.

