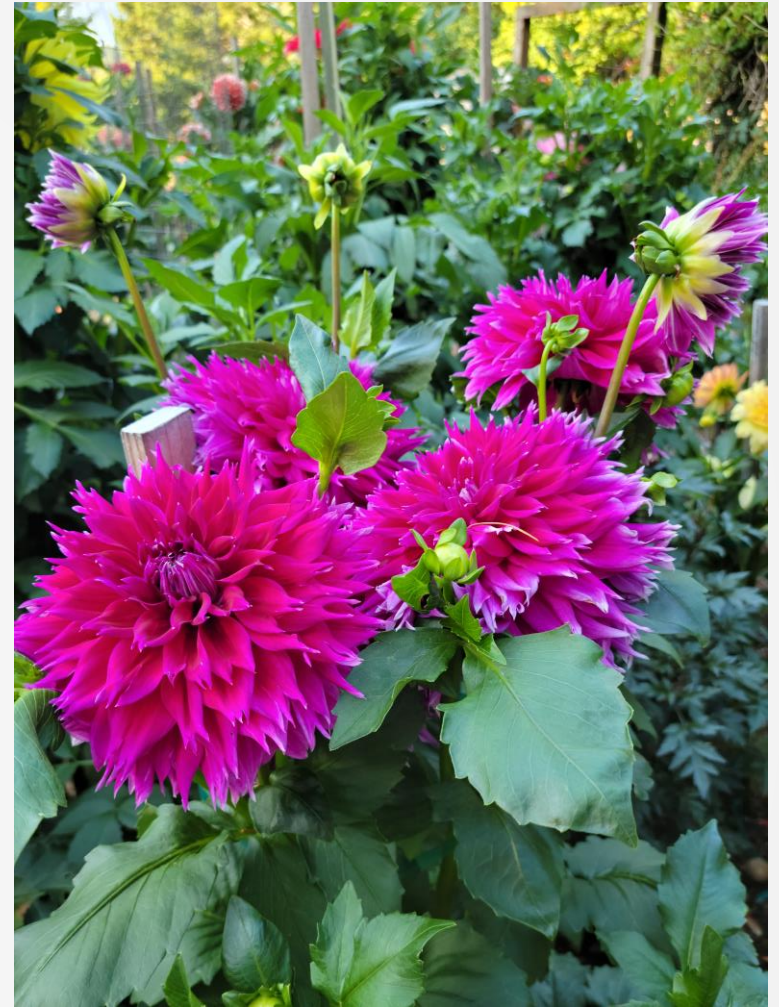


WSU Thurston County Extension
3054 Carpenter Rd. SE
Olympia, WA 98503



WASHINGTON STATE UNIVERSITY
EXTENSION

Growing Dahlias



WSU Master Gardener Program –
cultivating plants, people and
communities since 1973



Why dahlias?

- Prolific blooms July-September, until first hard frost
- Beautiful cut flower for bouquets
- Bees love them
- Not scented
- Many different sizes, forms and colors

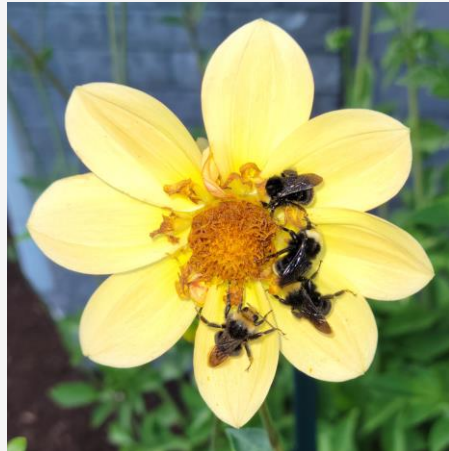


Photo by Jim Culp





FORMS



Formal Decorative



Informal Decorative



Semi Cactus



Straight Cactus



Incurved Cactus



Lacinate



Ball



Miniature Ball



Pompon



Waterlily



Peony



Anemone



Collarette



Single



Mignon Single



Orchid



Stellar



Double Novelty



Open Novelty



Orchette

Bloom Size

- Blooms can be as small as 1 inch in diameter and as large as 15 inches





Size of Plant

- Height of plant can vary from one foot to seven feet, average 3-5 feet
- Important to know the estimated height so you know where to plant them – shorter ones in the front of the bed or in pots, taller plants near the back
- Height is an estimate and it can vary based on the soil, water and fertilizer.
- You can manage the height with some pinching and pruning.





Dahlias Grow from Tubers

- Tubers vary in size and shape
- The plant grows from an “eye” or growth bud
- Roots grow from the other end
- Don’t worry if you’re not sure which end is which as you will just lay it on its side when you plant it.







Where to Plant

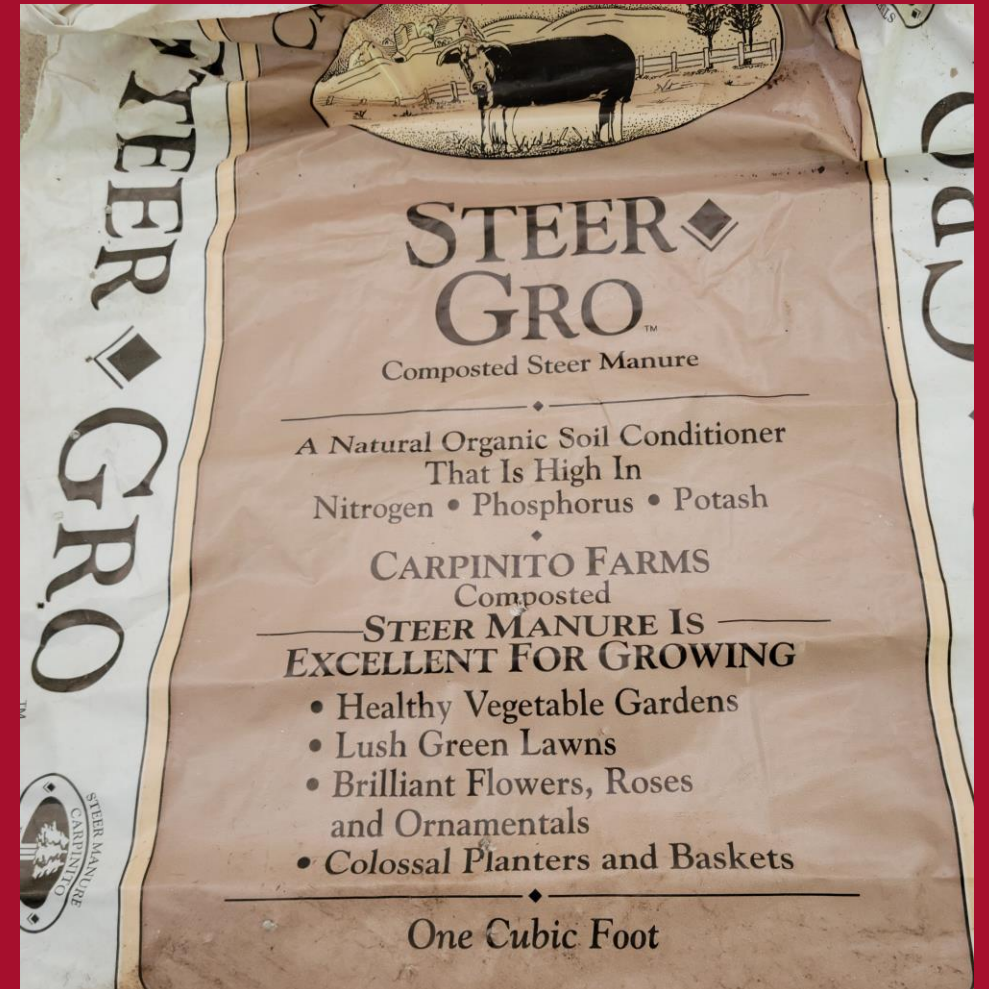
- Choose a sunny location – at least 6-8 hours of full sun
- Dahlia bed – plant tubers 18-24” apart with 2-3 feet between rows
- Any open spaces in yard
- Avoid wet locations





Soil

- Well-prepared, well-drained soil
- Add soil conditioner (organic material):
 - Compost
 - Manure (composted)
- Dahlias prefer neutral or slightly acidic soil





Fertilizer

- 10-20-20 is recommended
- One option: About two weeks before planting, broadcast the fertilizer over the soil and work it in.
- Another option: Put a couple tablespoons of fertilizer in the hole before planting the tuber – mix the fertilizer into the soil.
- Be careful with high nitrogen fertilizers because they will encourage the plant to grow more foliage and less blooms.

10-20-20	
GUARANTEED ANALYSIS	
TOTAL NITROGEN (N)	10.00%
AVAILABLE PHOSPHATE (P ₂ O ₅)	20.00%
SOLUBLE POTASH (K ₂ O)	20.00%



Planting Dahlia Tubers – two options

1. PLANT DIRECTLY IN GROUND

- May need to protect from slugs, rabbits
- Must have well-drained soil to avoid rotting tubers





Planting Dahlia Tubers

2. PLANT IN POTS INITIALLY

- Plant in pots in a greenhouse or other protected location
- Can avoid slug/rabbit damage to new tender plants
- Can start growing earlier (April) and possibly have earlier blooms
- Plant in ground mid May or when plants are 10-15 inches tall

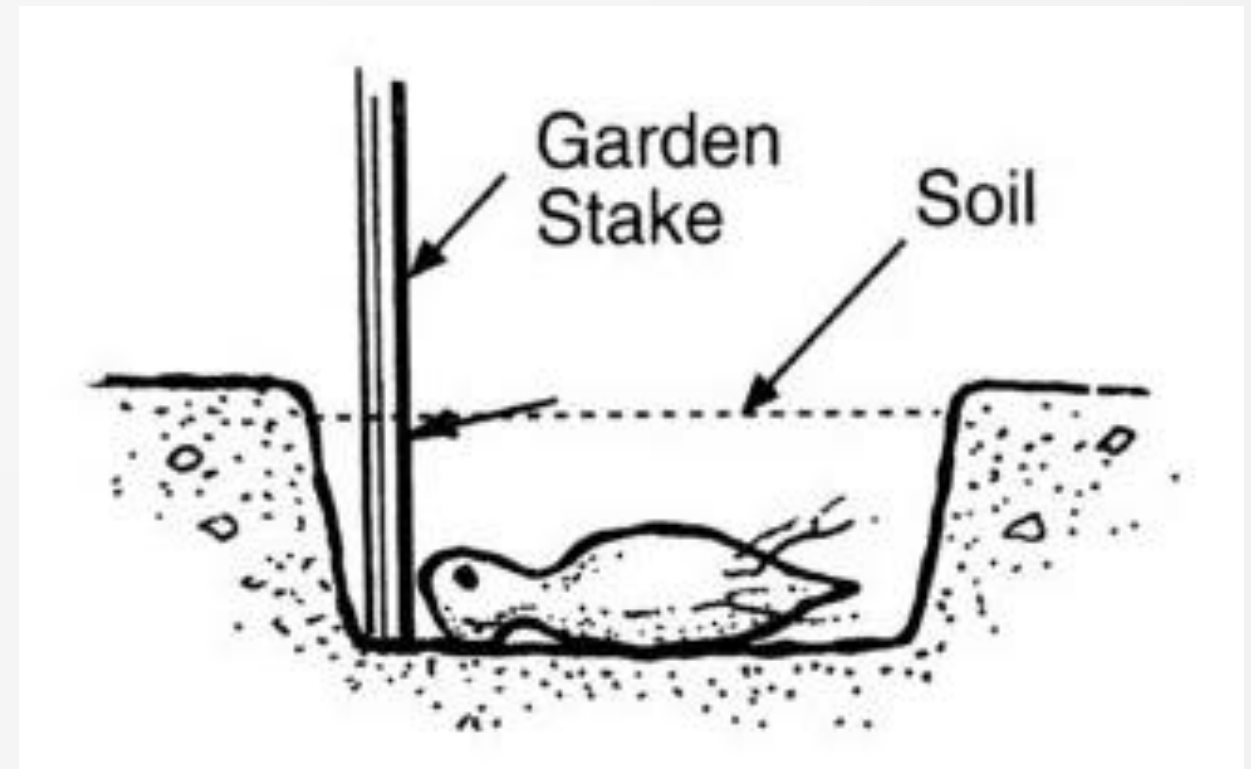




When and how to plant

In this area, plant anytime after the last frost, which can be between April 15 and June 1 -- typically around Mother's Day is safe.

- Check how moist your soil is – better to plant when the soil is a bit dry than wet.
- Dig a hole 5-6 inches deep – add fertilizer or soil amendments and mix into the soil.
- Place the tuber flat with the eye upward.
- Add a stake next to the tuber – easier to do it at planting time than later.
- If heavy soil, may not need to plant as deep.
- Some people don't fill in all the soil into the hole right away.





Staking

- Short plants (12-18" tall) may not need staking
- Larger plants need some type of staking
- Can also use fencing, tomato cages, etc. to support the dahlias
- As the dahlia grows, use garden tape, string, or velcro to secure the stems to your stake





Watering

- Depends on the weather
- Generally do not water the tuber until it sprouts above ground. Everything they need initially is stored in the tuber.
- Later in the growing season, they need more water.
- A thorough, deep watering is better than frequent, light watering.
- Water more frequently if the weather is hot.
- A drip system on a timer is my favorite way to water!



Pinching

For compact, bushy plants with more flowers, pinch out the center growing tip when the plant is about one foot high, or has 3-5 sets of leaves.

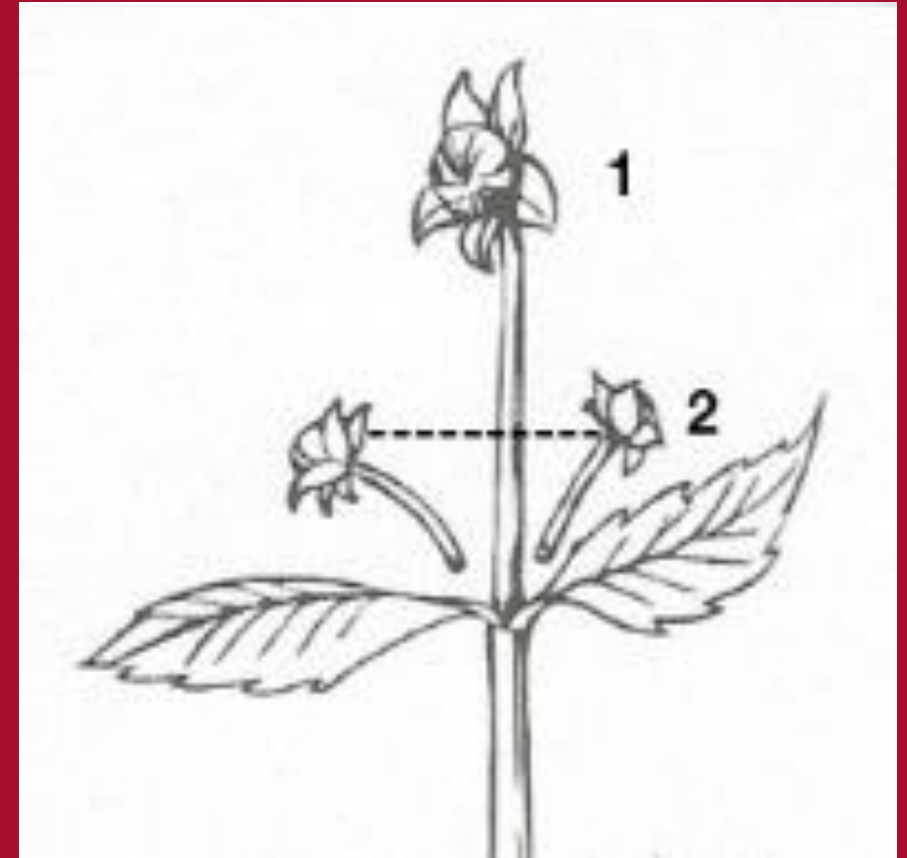






Disbudding

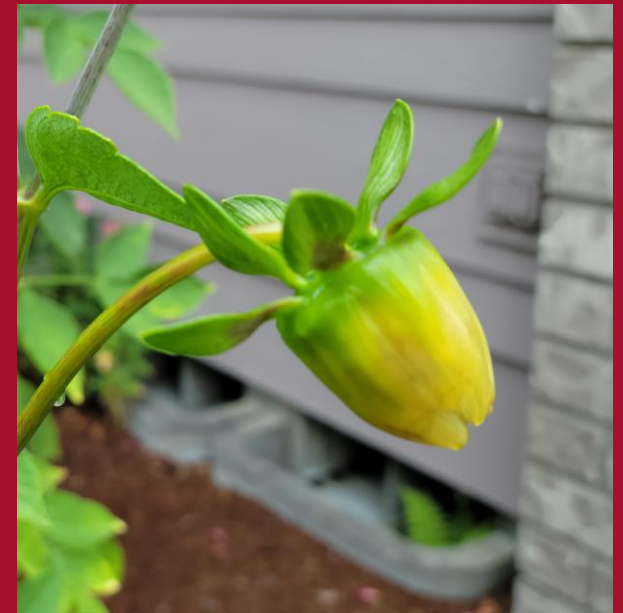
- Dahlias have blooms in sets of three.
- For bigger blooms, pinch off the two side buds





Deadheading

- For more blooms, snip off the dead blooms
- At the end of the season, you can leave some until they dry and then collect the seeds
- Seeds result in new types of dahlias
- Start seeds in small pots in the spring





Weeding

- Dahlias can have roots near the surface so be careful cultivating
- Avoid cultivating more than two inches deep and try to stay 12-18" away from the main stalk
- Hand weeding is best, especially early in the season while the weeds are very small.

Point Defiance Dahlia Trial Garden





Cutting flowers

- Avoid cutting in the heat of the afternoon – best to cut in the morning or evening
- Display in a cool part of your home
- Change the water daily or at least every other day





PESTS!!! Rabbits!

- They really like new tender leaves, but generally don't bother the more mature plants.
- I try to fence the plants so the rabbits can't get to the lower leaves.







Chocolate Arion slug – non-native

SLUGS

Slugs love dahlias and can decimate an entire plant in one night!

- Physical removal: Check for slugs after the sun goes down or first thing in the morning, especially after it has rained
- Slug traps
- Various slug killers – Sluggo, Corry's, etc. – **READ THE LABEL FOR CAUTIONS ABOUT USE, KIDS & PETS!!**



Slug eggs



Friendly,
slug-eating
snake!





Earwigs

- They eat holes in leaves or chew on new shoots but also eat aphids & mites!
- Remove debris in the garden that provides hiding places for them
- Can collect them in rolled up newspapers and then dispose of them





Aphids

- Can cause curling of leaves.
- Ants are attracted to the honeydew that the aphids create and will protect the aphids from predators.
- Spray foliage with a strong stream of cold water to remove the aphids.

For more on pests:

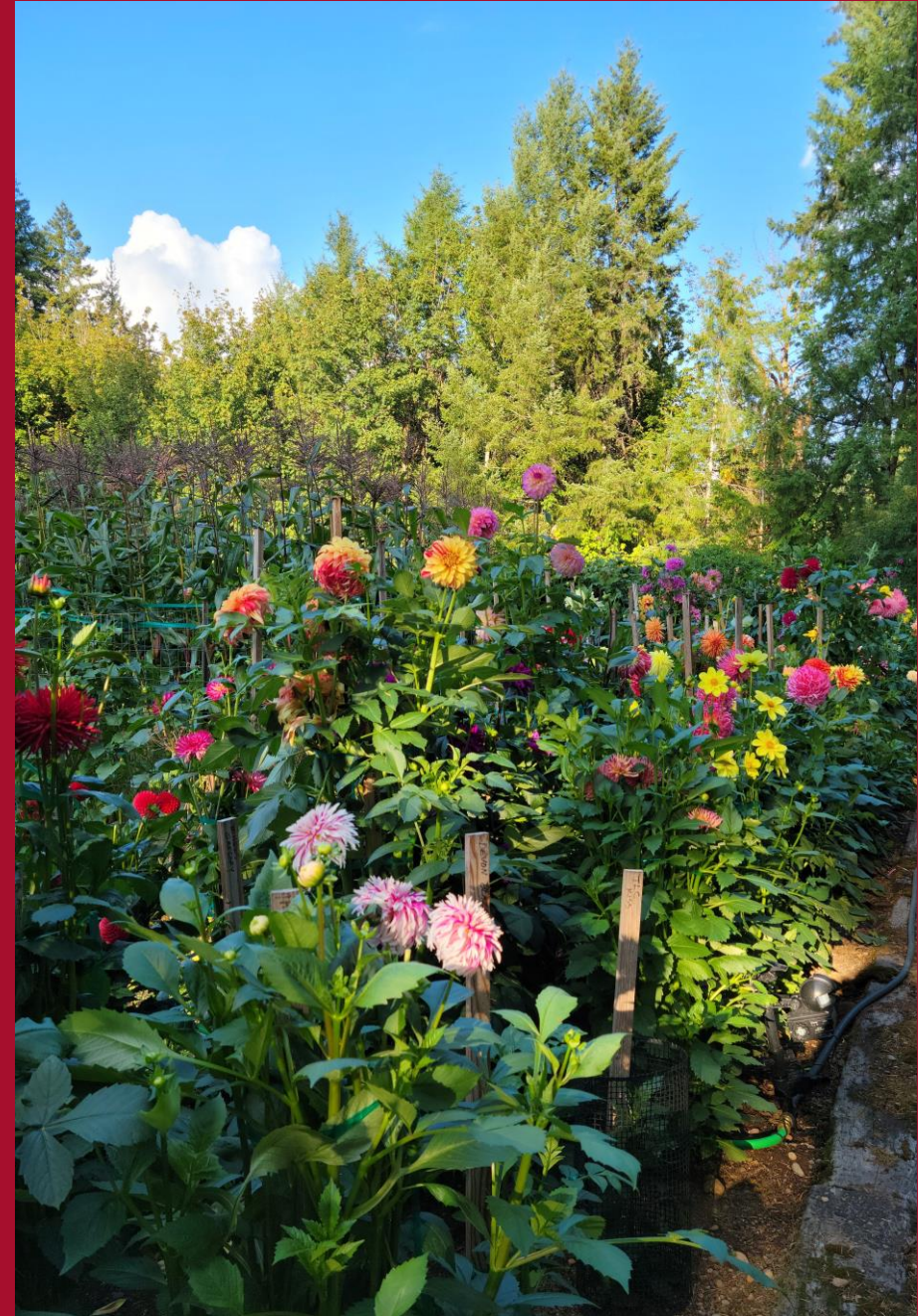
- www.hortsense.cahnrs.wsu.edu/common-problems/





Enjoy your dahlias!

- While they are still blooming, check your markers to make sure you know the variety.



After the first hard frost ...

- The plants will be dead and wilted
- Some people cut the plants in the fall before the frost.
- Cut the plant stalk down to about 6 inches, then wait a week or two for the tubers to develop eyes
- This is the time to dig the tubers, divide them, and place into storage for the winter.



Do I have to dig the tubers? It depends...

- Are they growing in soil that will drain well through the winter?
- Do you want more of that type of dahlia?
- Has it been several years since you have dug the plant? The tuber clump gets bigger every year and harder to divide.
- If not digging, cover them with straw or mulch.





Digging tubers – what tool to use?

Factors to consider:

- Type of soil – sandy, loam, clay
- Personal preference





Digging tubers

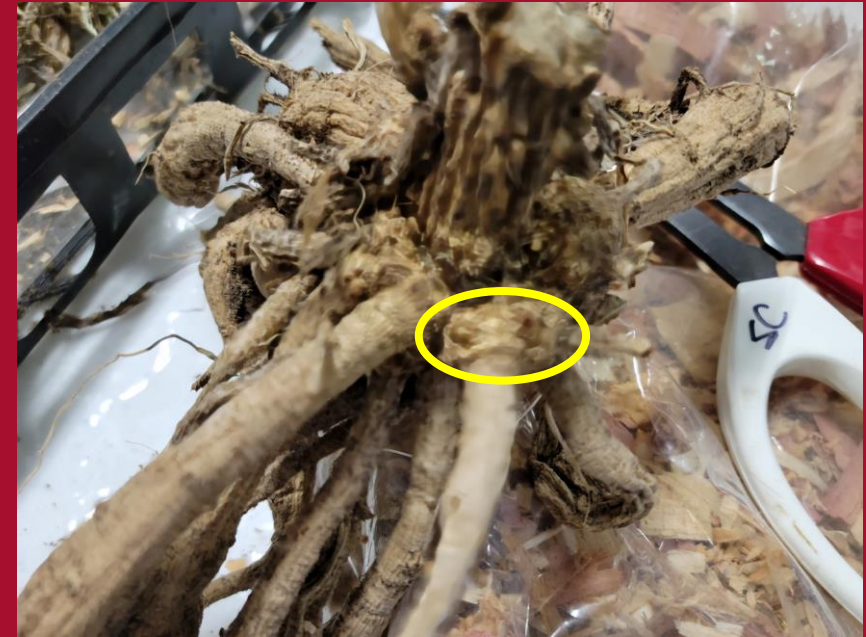
- Dig all around the plant and lift it out of the soil being careful not to break off the tubers.
- If you accidentally cut off part of the root end of the tuber, don't worry, it will likely still grow.
- Hose the dirt off the clump
- Put it in a dry location to dry
- Be sure to mark the name of the tuber in some way





Dividing the tubers

- Look for the “eye” which is where the plant will grow from next spring.
- The “eye” is near the crown or stem of the mother plant.
- If there is no eye, the tuber will not grow and you can discard it.
- If you’re not sure, keep it and check again in the spring.







Storing the tubers

- Make sure the tubers are dry.
- Store them in layers of sawdust, shavings, or similar.
- Store in a location where the temperature will be 40-45 degrees – cool but not below freezing.
- Check them monthly – if any appear shriveled, spray lightly with some water. Discard any that are rotting.



Questions?

General Gardening Questions and Info

Email - master@co.thurston.wa.us

Website - <https://extension.wsu.edu/thurston/>

WSU Master Gardener Program Questions-

Cori Carlton

Program Manager

WSU Master Gardener and Master Recycler Composter Programs

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Phone: 360-867-2162

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