

GARDEN TIME

By Robert Schmidt

I have had several phone calls during the past week asking me when I am going to plant my dahlias and what to do about dahlias that were left in the ground over winter and are now sending up stems.

If you grew dahlias last year and left them in the ground over winter they should be dug up now and divided. Even if you want only one plant, divide the clump, plant one division and give the others away. Leaving the clump in the ground will give you several main stems, a lot of early flowers and usually poor flowers in the fall when they ought to be at their best.

In digging the clump be careful not to break the necks of the tuberous roots. Some varieties have very slender necks. In dividing the clump, which is best done with a long slender knife blade, you must leave at least one bud or eye and one root with each division. You will find the buds on the main stem or at the base of the stem—not on the root itself.

If long sprouts have developed, they must be cut back to about one-half inch of the stem or eye. Usually you can get from three to five divisions from each clump. These divisions may be planted now or can be kept in a cool place, covered with peat moss or dry sand until the proper planting time.

I rarely plant before May 1 here in Raleigh. My advice would be to plant during early May in the central and western portions of the state, and about May 25th to June 1 in the extreme eastern portion of the state.

How can you grow large dinner plate size dahlias? You must buy varieties which naturally grow large. There are hundreds of varieties ranging in size from one to 17 inches in diameter. Culture and removing the buds will increase size to a limited extent, but if you want the big ones you must buy the proper varieties.

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