

# Spring Seasonal Planting Guide

*Welcome to the spring growing season. Your tubers have arrived! Please store them in their packaging in a cool, dark place until you are ready to plant them. Read on before planting and for any more information please visit [hudsonvalleyseed.com](http://hudsonvalleyseed.com).*

## **Sunchokes Plant as soon as possible.**

Sunchokes are a delightful cross between beautiful sunflowers with edible tubers packed full of nutrients. These native tubers have a sweet, nutty flavor and can be a great substitute to potatoes. Sunchokes are a great source of inulin which is a type of fiber that can help you feel more full after eating, maintain consistent blood sugar levels and can help lower cholesterol levels. Do be weary though, eating these in bulk can amount to some very gassy moments.

Sunchokes are sensitive to drying out; keep them closed in their bags in a cool place until planting. Plant tubers in fertile, well-draining soil 4" deep and 12-18" apart. They should be planted in full sun, with the growing tips pointing upwards. Shoots will emerge in 1 to 3 weeks. Large tubers can be split, as with potatoes, as long as each tuber section has 2-3 eyes per piece. Midsummer, you may choose to cut the bright yellow flowers for indoor arrangements and to divert more energy to the growth of tubers.

Begin harvesting in late summer or wait for fall frosts to sweeten the roots. Even in cold climates with hard-freezing soil, tubers will overwinter in the soil without fuss. Harvest with a digging fork, feeling for tubers with your fingers. They may be up to 1' deep in the soil. Rinse tubers and pat dry to remove excess soil. Leave them somewhere warm, dark and dry to cure for 5-7 days. Before they are stored make sure they are completely dry. Then, wrap the tubers in paper towels, place them in sealed plastic bags and store in a refrigerator or cool root cellar. They will keep like this for 2-5 months.

Sunchokes are perennial crops with an insistent habit of spreading. To keep them contained, grow them in containers, with in-ground barriers, or mow around the edges of your sunchoke beds in mid-spring. Be sure to cut down any new shoots that are emerging in undesirable places.

## **Potatoes Plant from 2 weeks before last frost until early summer.**

Prepare tuber planting by setting them in a room-temperature environment where they will be exposed to medium light for about a week. Potatoes need at least 6 hours of direct sunlight and fertile, well-draining soil. In the fall you may mix compost or organic matter into the soil. It is suggested to plant these tubers about 2 to 4 weeks before your zone's average last frost date up through early summer. The soil should be dry and weed-free. A day or two before planting, cut any potatoes larger than egg size into smaller pieces (no smaller than 2" square) with a sharp, clean knife—being sure that each piece contains 1-2 eyes. Allow the cut surface of the potato to dry and form a thick callus before planting. You can even let the potatoes begin to produce stout, stocky, green sprouts, called chitting.



Plant pieces 6-12" apart. There are two different ways to plant these tasty starch packed tubers! One way is at the bottom of a trenched row about 6 to 8" deep and covered with 4" of soil to begin. As the plants grow, hill up, or pile soil around the base of the plants at three-week intervals to encourage plentiful tubers—and to prevent the sun from turning them green.

Another way is in a large grow bag— a 10-gallon size can have 3-5 evenly spaced tubers. Fill the bag with soil about 4" with the top rolled down, place your potatoes on the surface with the eyes up, and cover with 3" of soil. As the plants grow, unroll the bag slightly and add about 4" of soil, so that only 3-4" of foliage are left exposed. Continue to add 4" of soil at three-week intervals until the bag is full.

The edible part of the potato tuber will develop from the underground storage portion of the plant, called stolons. The plants will be about 6 to 8 inches tall above ground when the new potatoes are ready to harvest. This is about six weeks into the growth of the plant, but for mature spuds, allow the foliage to senesce, or die back, and then harvest at your leisure. You can gently remove them from the soil with a fork if you use the trench method or use your hands in the grow bag. Remove all spuds before hard freezes begin to penetrate the soil. Then enjoy these fan-favorite tubers in your favorite form; mashed, fried, baked, steaming, boiled, roasting, you name it!

**Dahlias Plant from 1 week after last frost until 4 weeks after last frost.**

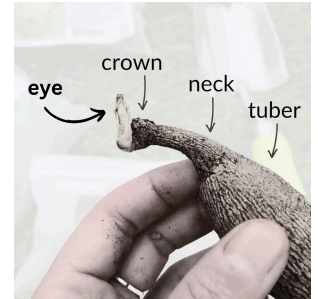
## What to do Before Planting

Native to Mexico and Central America, dahlias are sensitive to frost. Plant them after all danger of frost has passed, around the same time as tomatoes. Pick a sunny spot with well-draining, fertile, slightly acidic soil. Because dahlias are so diverse, spacing requirements will differ depending on type, but a good rule of thumb is to space tubers between 12-18" apart. If your growing season is short, you can start dahlias indoors in large containers up to 4-6 weeks ahead of the final frost. Store tubers in a cool place until two weeks before planting, then store at room temperature until planting; this will "wake up" the tubers before they go in the ground.

## How to Plant

The tuber itself stores all of the nutrients needed for the plant to send out its first set of leaves and fine roots. Locate the crown of the tuber above the neck and rest the tuber sideways into the hole with the crown toward the soil surface. Bury the tuber, lightly pressing the soil around it, avoiding damage to the eye(s).

Select a spot with full sun and well-draining soil. When planting outdoors, dig a hole approximately 6" deep by 6" wide. Larger clumps of tubers will need a wider hole. Lay tubers into the soil horizontally about 4-6" below the surface, 12-24" apart, with the growing eye facing upwards. If the soil is very dry at planting, water it lightly. Otherwise, wait to water until sprouts emerge from the ground. Emergence varies *dramatically* from plant to plant and can take up to 3 weeks.



## Growing Conditions and Care

Once established, plants appreciate plentiful water—a deep soaking 2-3 times per week is ideal in normal conditions. Plants also benefit from a low-nitrogen organic fertilizer applied once or twice. Too much nitrogen will result in leafy foliage and will inhibit production. Dahlias can grow top-heavy and fall over in the wind, so it's also a good idea to add stakes early on and tie your dahlia to the stake as it grows. Staking is recommended for varieties that reach 3 feet or more in height.

## Harvesting

Cut the flowers frequently to encourage plentiful blooms for as long a season as possible. Or, leave some flowers to open up fully and attract pollinators. For more blooms, cut often! Don't just deadhead, harvest just-opening blooms for indoor vase arrangements and bouquets. Dahlias are generally very prolific and will bloom right up to the first frost.

## How to Save Your Own Dahlia Tubers & Storing

To retain tubers for future years, gently dig them up about 2 weeks after a killing frost. Cut the stem down to about 6 inches, rinse off dirt, and allow the tubers to air dry in a protected place for 24 hours. After curing, tubers can be divided, packed in a dry storage medium—such as peat moss, wood shavings, or dry sand—and stored in a cool, protected area for the winter (40°-50°F is ideal). A cool basement works, as does any free space in your fridge. *Do not allow tubers to freeze!* Check the tubers monthly throughout the winter: remove any that show signs of rot, and adjust conditions if needed.

