

ADS Dahlia University – Supporting Your Dahlias

Dahlias (other than the bedding and container varieties) must be supported. Early in the season the supports train the plants to grow straight and upward. During the season, they help the plants weather the storms and winds. And late in the season, the supports protect the brittle stems. There are many ways to support your dahlias.

Supporting Individual Plants

One of the most common ways to support your dahlias is to individually stake and tie the plants. This is a little time consuming, but like most tasks, if you keep up with it, this method is manageable and will yield excellent results. It also helps you become very acquainted with each individual plant and its needs. It is also a good plan if you have only a dozen or so plants.

You will want to choose very sturdy stakes. Half inch rebar, painted or not is a good choice. Unpainted rebar will rust and look very natural in the garden. The heavy duty, half inch garden stakes are also an adequate choice. The rough surface of both these options make tying easier with little slippage. Aluminum conduit, 1.25 inch PVC pipe, and fiberglass stakes can also do the job. All of these options will last a long time. The ¼ inch “bamboo” stakes sold in garden centers and big box stores are **not** strong enough to support a dahlia plant.

Whatever you choose, be sure to place stakes first and then plant to avoid tuber and root damage. If you add the stakes later you risk impaling the tubers or roots. Be sure to sink the stake deep enough (about a foot or even more in sandy soil) to make the stake really sturdy. If you plan to disbranch your plants, individual staking will contribute to the ease of doing so.

As the season progresses you will need to tie your plants to the stakes. Be sure to check out this [video on tying](#). In the video, ADS Board member Harry Risetto will demonstrate how to tie dahlias. He says – “Wrap the garden jute twine (preferably 3 ply) around the plant. When you reach the back of the plant, criss-cross the two ends and loop twice around the stake and tie it. The idea is: tight around the stake and loose around the plant. This will prevent strangulation as the stalk thickens.”

Tomato cages can also be used for dahlia supports. An Ohio grower reports:

”I use tomato cages. I used to use the round ones that can be found anywhere. The stronger the wiring the better. Currently, I am switching to a square tomato cage that is strong, 4 ft. tall, and it folds flat at the end of the season - a big plus. These collapsible cages are available at garden centers, by catalog, and online. I place the cage around the dahlia at planting time. With the square cages, I can tie the dahlia stems, although not being an avid dahlia show participant, I mostly just let the plants fill the cage. When I have a tall growing dahlia, I put a stake inside the cage and tie to the stake. The tomato cages keep the dahlias under control for me.”

Supporting Plants by Group

You can support your dahlia plants in groups. Here are some options suggested by ADS members:

“I use T posts and make small 3’ x 6’ rectangles in 42 to 48 foot rows and use poly twine to make a corral. Place one string around the corral border about 12” above the ground, and another at about 30”. I plant inside the corral in a diagonal pattern and the plants generally grow at a similar size and hold each other up”. (Oregon Grower)

A somewhat similar and very intriguing support system is explained in this video [from a California grower](#).

“Plastic netting may be used to support dahlias. This eliminates the need to drive a stake for each dahlia plant. We have found this system to be effective for us and it is working for others in our region. The netting works well when you planting dahlias like a crop – see the photograph below.



We put up two layers of netting, parallel to the ground – the first one about 16-18” off the ground and the second one 32-36” off the ground. The mesh is 4” Tenax Hortonova Plant Net 59” x 328’ and is available online.” (Washington Growers)

Supporting your plants will greatly enhance your dahlia garden.

Our courses are written by dahlia enthusiasts, not necessarily scientists or horticulturalists. These enthusiasts are pleased to share their experience and best practices with you. Please keep in mind that there are a variety of opinions in the dahlia community and that different solutions and procedures work in different circumstances and locales. We urge you to participate in a [local society](#) where you will meet great growers with knowledge of growing dahlias in your area...and you'll have fun!

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