



## **DAHLIA STORAGE & STORING MEDIUMS** by Donna Lane

Many people have already put their dahlias to bed, but some are just starting. Here is some information for those who might have not yet stored their treasures.

### **STORAGE**

There are several ways of storing dahlia tubers for winter. The crucial part of the process is cleaning and drying. However, even the best methods still require you to inspect the tubers occasionally over the course of the winter. Environmental changes in the storage location, such as increased humidity or fluctuating temperatures, can still damage overwintering dahlia tubers.

You can store the tubers in a variety of containers – milk crates, plastic bins, paper bags, wood and cardboard boxes all do the trick. Just make sure there is space left between each tuber and there is some air circulation. Use a medium between layers and to separate tubers. Also make sure that moisture can't escape from your container AND that moisture will not build up in the container. If you use a plastic crate or cardboard box, for example, line with several layers of newspaper on all sides of the container and keep the top of the container closed.

The humidity should be kept medium-high to keep tubers from drying and shriveling. Place the tubers in a cool, dark space that won't freeze (32°F is freezing). For many, this could be an unheated basement, attic, closet, or utility room.

### **STORAGE MEDIUMS**

#### *PET BEDDING MATERIAL*

Cedar wood shavings are all-natural; they are good at controlling odor and have some natural insecticidal properties. Cedar shavings can be found in any pet store or farm feed location. It is the least expensive storage medium available.

#### *COARSE VERMICULITE*

Vermiculite is an all-natural mineral that is used as both a building material and a planting medium. Its scientific name is hydrated laminar magnesium-aluminum-iron silicate. In its natural form, vermiculite is flaky and metallic, much like mica.

For horticultural use, vermiculite is found in four different grades or granule sizes. The granule size for coarse vermiculite (grade #3) is 3mm to 6mm and the super coarse vermiculite (grade #4) is 4mm to 8 mm. The coarse and extra-coarse varieties are most popular for dahlia storage. They can be reused year after year. (Vermiculite shown below. Left: grade 4, extra coarse. Right: grade 1, fine)



### *PEAT MOSS*

Peat moss is dead fibrous material that forms when mosses and other living material decompose in peat bogs. It takes several millennia for peat moss to form, and peat bogs gain less than a millimeter in depth every year. Since the process is so slow, peat moss isn't considered a renewable resource. In addition, the mining process releases massive amounts of carbon into the atmosphere, and the bogs continue to exhale carbon long after the mining ends.

Because of these environmental issues, and because peat moss tends to suck moisture out of dahlia tubers, it is not recommended as a storage medium.

### *COCONUT COIR*

Coconut Coir is environmentally safe and, unlike peat moss which breaks down over time, it can be used more than once. It's also a repurposed waste product from a renewable resource, unlike the peat bogs where we get our peat moss.

Everything between the shell and the outer coating of the coconut seed is considered coco coir. There are amazing benefits to using coconut coir in your garden. But just like any other kind of growing media, there are also some downsides to consider. For good information about the types and uses of Coir, see <https://www.epicgardening.com/coconut-coir/>

### *SARAN WRAP*

*This method does not work for everyone!!* After the tubers are divided, washed, labeled and treated with a fungicide, set them aside to dry overnight. Wrap them as soon as they are

sufficiently dry since tubers tend to get spongy and subject to drying out if permitted to sit around in the open for long periods of time. With this method, tubers with slender necks can be preserved.

Tear off a sheet of plastic wrap about 20 or more inches long and lay it flat on a level surface. Place a tuber on one end and roll the plastic wrap over one complete turn. Lay another alongside and roll again. Be certain that no tuber is touching another; plastic wrap must separate all tubers. You may wrap up to five tubers or so per package, but in the last 5-7 inches, fold over the side portions of the plastic wrap and continue to roll to completion. Fasten with a piece of masking tape and label with the cultivar's name and any other information.

This method is cheap but labor-intensive. It's very useful if total storage space is limited. For more information and pictures of this storage method check the ADS website. <https://www.dahlia.org/docsinfo/articles/no-fuss-store-your-tubers-in-plastic-wrap/>

## **HORTICULTURAL TIDBIT**

*What's the Difference between a frost and a freeze?*

- A frost (ice crystals forming on surfaces) generally happens when the air temperature is between 36-32°F.
- A freeze happens when air temperature dips below 32°F. A hard freeze is usually between 28-25°F, and a killing freeze is 24°F and below.