



## Planning Your Dream Dahlia Garden: Choosing the Right Varieties

Wondering what dahlia varieties to grow in your garden this year? Here are a few tips to help guide your selection.

### Know Your Space

**Assess your garden size:** Consider where you grew dahlias last year or the dimensions of your new beds. This will help estimate how many plants you can comfortably accommodate.

**Mind the spacing:** Generally, dahlias thrive with 12 inches between plants for optimal growth and airflow. Larger varieties need more space, while smaller ones can do well with 10 inches.

**Plan your layout:** A 3 ft x 9 ft bed can fit 18 dahlias in 2 rows at 12 inches apart. Want to fit more plants? At 10 inches, the same bed holds 22 plants in 2 rows or 33 in 3 rows (with a bit of a squeeze).

**Balance:** Consider spacing large varieties at 12 inches while placing smaller ones closer. Also remember, some hybridizers successfully plant seedlings as close as 4 inches and in pots to maximize the number of plants they can evaluate.

**Alternatives:** Compact dahlia varieties can also mingle in perennial borders or add color when grown in planters on a deck or around a driveway.

**Save replacements:** Not every tuber will have an eye or grow well. Plan to keep 10-20% of tubers as backup to ensure you can fill in empty spots.

## Selecting the “Best” Mix of Varieties

After estimating the number of plants you can fit into your garden, decide which varieties to grow again, which ones to let go and what to add this year.

**Evaluate overwintering tubers.** Consider discarding tubers of varieties that underperformed for two consecutive years. Some dahlias originating on the West Coast or from Europe might just not be a good fit for our hot and humid summers. Other varieties are genetically unstable and can lose form or vigor over time. Also find new homes for those varieties that don't fit your color scheme or that aren't favorites in bouquets. However, new varieties that floundered in their first year in your garden should be given another chance to shine.

**Integrate new additions:** Add already purchased tubers to your planning mix.

**Balance the color palette.** If you tend to focus on specific colors, resulting in too many pink or red dahlias for example, consider introducing contrasting blooms for more vibrant bouquets.

Need inspirations? Explore color theory for new combinations.

<https://www.floristwithflowers.com.au/blog/creating-with-the-colour-wheel/>



**Explore trend colors.** For example, add orange dahlias which match the current trend color "*Peach Fuzz*", the Pantone Color of the Year 2024 to your garden. Shades of orange beautifully complement most dahlia hues, even if orange isn't your usual preference.

Examples of varieties in colors matching "*Peach Fuzz*":

For more peachy ideas:

<https://www.sarahraven.com/inspiration/SP24-peach-fuzz>

<https://paperheartdesign.com/blog/color-palette-peach-fuzz-pantone-2024-color-of-the-year>

**Consider Varieties for Showing:** If you are interested in entering dahlias in a show, check out the online resources of the American Dahlia Society (ADS). Every year ADS compiles two lists of the top prize-winning dahlia varieties from all ADS shows. Improve your chances to grow successful show blooms by adding some of those top varieties to your garden.

<https://www.dahlia.org/2022-fabulous-fifty-and-cream-of-the-crop-posted-2/>

**Fabulous Fifty:** Lists cultivars that received at least 50 blue and higher awards in sanctioned ADS shows within the past year.

**Cream of the Crop:** Includes all cultivars from US and Canadian dahlia shows that received at least 15 combined blue and higher awards in the past year.

**Note:** Varieties with the largest blooms (AA and A sizes) can be difficult to grow to show quality. To compete successfully in those classes requires some experience.

Instead, choose varieties with smaller sized blooms in your favorite form or color. Opt for dahlias in sections with few show entries. For example, lacinated cactus or open-centered dahlias are frequently underrepresented on the show tables. You'll be more likely to have a winning entry in those sections.

**Choose Varieties for Bouquets:** While many show flowers are good cut flowers, they might not always be the best selection for beautiful bouquets. Huge or tiny blooms, vibrant, saturated colors that clash, or open varieties with few petals can be impractical in arrangements. To select your ideal cut flower varieties, find out what flower farmers in your area are growing. Or explore the excellent resources provided by *Floret Flowers* in their popular book '*Discovering Dahlias*' and online. <https://a.co/d/eq1qCDw> <https://library.floretflowers.com/collections/dahlias-a-z>

**Criteria for Cut Flower Dahlias:** Long and strong stems, prolific blooms per plant, a long vase life, and good tubers are important for a reliable supply of bouquet flowers.

**Garden Varieties:** Dahlias are also grown as bedding plants or fillers in perennial beds. Those varieties tend to be shorter, should be robust and add color and interest to your garden.

**Criteria for garden varieties:** Long blooming, starting in early summer and continuing until first frost. Varieties often have compact growth between 1' to 3' in height, which minimizes the need for staking. Plants with smaller blooms under 6 inches are less susceptible to wind and rain damage and maintain their beauty intact throughout the summer. Opt for open-faced flower varieties to attract and feed pollinators like bumblebees and butterflies. Consider bright or contrasting bloom colors to create visual interest and enhance the vibrancy of your garden. Varieties with dark red foliage provide additional interest to a perennial bed.

#### **Examples of Popular Garden Dahlias:**

**Gallery Series** (imported) available from *Longfield Gardens* and *Brent and Becky's Bulbs*.

[https://www.longfield-gardens.com/search.php?search\\_query\\_adv=Gallery](https://www.longfield-gardens.com/search.php?search_query_adv=Gallery)

[https://brentandbeckysbulbs.com/?s=Gallery&post\\_type=product&dgwt\\_wcas=1](https://brentandbeckysbulbs.com/?s=Gallery&post_type=product&dgwt_wcas=1)

**Bishop Series** (dark foliage, Peony - open center) Bishop of Llandaff (red), B. of Dover (white), B. of Oxford (pink, peach), B. of Canterbury (purple), B. of York (yellow)

**Mystic Series™** (dark foliage, Single - open center): Mystic Spirit, M. Illusion, M. Fantasy, M. Dreamer are mainly sold as plants at local and online nurseries. For example, *Proven Winners* and *Burpee Plants* sell Mystic varieties.

**David Howard** (orange, dark foliage, 3'), **Ellen Huston** (red, dark foliage, 3'), **K-K-K Katie:** (orange, Orchid, 2'), bloom all summer.



Considering some of the above criteria, you'll be ready to select a mix of dahlia varieties that will bring life, color, and versatility to your garden.

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