

September Dahlia Growing Guide: Preparing to Show

Enter Your Blooms in the CSDS Annual Show

After months of hard work, it is time to enter your blooms in the CSDS Annual Show at the Chicago Botanic Garden. Exhibiting is fun. Remember, it is only a flower show after all, and you will learn a lot more about dahlias and be able to share your wonderful blooms with other club members and the public. You only need to follow some simple steps. Give it a go.

A few days prior to the show, you will choose your best blooms to exhibit. You will need to know the name of your dahlia as they are judged based on class and must be labeled. Look this information up in the [ADS Online Classification Guide](#). A club member can help you at set-up with properly labeling your blooms. Choose a bloom that has a straight stem, at least one set of leaves, is disbudded (with no visible sign of disbudding) and has no visible damage (such as insect or disease damage or be faded or browned).

Simply put, look for your most perfect bloom.

After choosing your bloom, cut your flowers in the evening or early morning when plant temperatures are coolest, just prior to the set-up days. Use clean, sharp knife or scissors so you don't crush the water-conducting tissue in the stem. If you are exhibiting multiple blooms, clean your knife or scissors between cuts. Always cut the stem several inches longer than necessary because further trimming may be needed when you stage your blooms. Remove the leaves from the portion of the stem that will be in water but remember to leave at least a set of leaves or your bloom will be disqualified.

Immediately after cutting, place the stems in lukewarm water (100 to 110° F). Some club members prefer to use hotter water. Move the freshly cut blooms to a cool location to condition for at least 15 to 20 minutes. "Conditioning" or "hardening" reduces the chances of stem blockage and promotes the quick water uptake necessary for long flower life. Never store flowers in a refrigerator with fruits or vegetables as the ethylene gas released by fruits and vegetables reduces vase life.

Finally, think about how you are going to transport your blooms to the show. Most injury occurs in transit. Keep your blooms stabilized in water during transit. One club member uses buckets that are stabilized in a laundry basket to prevent injury.



Laura Matz's method for transporting blooms

Once you get to the Chicago Botanic Garden, you will find other club members who can help you with staging and labeling your blooms. There is a good [YouTube video](#) from the UK on how to stage your blooms. For general videos about how to exhibit, see [Monterey Bay Dahlia Society video library](#). Scroll about down to the nine videos labeled Showing Dahlias Tutorial. Please note CSDS provides containers and floral foam to all our exhibitors so you will find some small differences in our club's approach.

Submitted by Justine Dial and Laura Matz. Adapted from the Puget Sound Dahlia Association.