

## February Dahlia Growing Guide: Waking Up Your Tubers

Winter is a good time to check your stored dahlia tubers. If you have lost some tubers due to rot, it is still early enough to order replacements.

Growers take cuttings for various reasons, but the most common are to increase the quantity of stock and to be able to start the season with growing plants. Your first step in cuttings propagation is “waking up your tubers” and getting them to sprout. A lot of our CSDS members start to wake up their tubers around Valentine’s Day, February 14<sup>th</sup>.

To start the process, you will need to place your tubers in a slightly damp medium (every grower has their special sauce here). Some use just vermiculite, some a soilless potting mix, while some use coir. A good soilless mix would be a peat-based mix, generally includes perlite, and is the type of mix CSDS is selling to members. You do want to select a medium that will retain moisture, has high air porosity, and is sterile (free from plant pathogens). The dirt from your yard won’t work because in the Chicago area our soil tends to have low air porosity, is primarily clay, and isn’t sterile.

You need to be ever so careful with how much moisture is added to your medium as your tubers could rot if the medium is too wet. Once your mix is slightly damp, it needs to be placed into a container, such as a nursery flat or a plastic Ziploc bag, that will allow the little moisture that is there to remain. You don’t want a container with drainage holes. The tubers should be placed in a position that will allow you to access the sprouts on the neck when it is time to make your cuttings. One popular method is burying the tuber beneath the medium surface with the neck above the surface. Providing some warmth underneath (such as from a soil heating mat) should help wake up your tubers, and you should see sprouting within a few weeks.



There is a lot of variation among varieties with some tubers being notoriously difficult to get to sprout. Reach out to some of our seasoned CSDS growers and get their insights on what works for them if you are having difficulty in getting a tuber to wake up. Once a tuber sprouts, having artificial light available is helpful and will prevent leggy sprouts.

*Submitted by Justine Dial and Laura Matz. Adapted from the Puget Sound Dahlia Association. Photo by Ted Magura.*