

Dahlias: Avoiding Tubers 2

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Decided to republish last year's article after discovering a crop of dahlias forming tubers.

Cutting or seed produced dahlias are wonderful spring bedding plants. As you prepare for this spring's production, please keep in mind the critical photoperiod required to keep dahlias from forming tubers. If plant stall occurs (Figure 1), do the finger test. Poke/dig around the base of the plant for the presence of tubers to confirm the situation (Figures 2 and 3). Tuber formation stalls leaf growth and delays flowering. It is difficult to get the plants growing again. Many times when growth restarts, it is sporadic, which results in uneven flowering and lost sales.

Tuber formation in dahlias is a short day response. Flowering occurs with long days. In North Carolina, we generally use the first week of March as the time

when the days are sufficient to provide long day conditions that avoid tuber formation. Before that time, growers need to provide supplemental lighting.

It turns out how you provide lighting matters too. Dr. Allen

Hammer of Dümmer USA found recommended it was better to provide a 14-hour day extension to help build the plant vegetatively than to provide nighttime interruption. Night interruption encourages early flowering, which may result in less than adequate



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Fig. 1. Stalled growth of dahlia due to tuber formation.



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Fig. 2. Dig around the base of the plant to find tubers.

leaf production before the plant blooms. This can result in small, premature flowering plants.

Key Points.

In summary, dahlias need long days to avoid stalled growth and tuber formation. Dig around the

base of the plant for the occurrence of tubers if the plants stall. Lighting should be provided so that the day is extended to 14 hours. Night interruption should be avoided because it encourages earlier flowering that may limit the bulking up of the plant.



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Fig. 3. Tubers near the stem base.