

## **Overwintering Dahlias-Linda McIntosh, OKMG**

### **Lift (=dig)**

Dahlias should be lifted after the first killing frost when flowers, foliage and stems are blackened.

A good benchmark timing for the Okanagan is around Thanksgiving. Notice the word “lift” is used instead of “dig”. The goal is to keep the stems and the tubers intact and undamaged; a broken neck can be fatal. The recommended practice is to lop off the stalks 4 to 6 inches above the tubers.

Once the bulk of the plant has been eliminated, it is easier to concentrate on accessing the tubers. Using a fork or shovel, penetrate the soil a fair distance (8 to 12 inches) from the stalk stumps and loosen the soil. Move the fork or shovel under the tuber mass and lift. It’s a good idea to label the dahlia with the name or colour at this time which can be done by writing on the tuber with a garden marker pen or by attaching a tag to the stem.

Once the tubers are out of the ground, do a cursory cleaning by removing as much soil as possible. Repatriate earthworms and other creatures to the garden from whence they came. Tubers can be thoroughly cleaned by hosing them down or you can leave them somewhat soiled.

The advantages of thorough cleaning are that critters are removed, growth eyes will be more readily discerned and mother tubers will be evident. The disadvantages are the additional work and drying time. To dry the tubers, place them with stems down so that any moisture in the hollow stems will drain. Also, if the tubers haven’t been washed, the soil in the crevices between tubers will be more exposed and dry more readily which makes dividing easier.

Place the dried tubers in a cool place for winter i.e. basement, cold room, etc. Check them every month for mildew and new growth.