

## Friends of Old Bulbs Gazette

[Old House Gardens](#), Ann Arbor, Michigan, 734-995-1486

“Spring...when the world is mud-luscious...when the world is puddle-wonderful.”

-e.e. cummings, American poet (1894-1962)

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### Shipping Begins Next Week!

We've had quite low temperatures here in Michigan this week but we're optimistic about starting shipping soon. We ship to the warmest parts of the country first, since they've had spring for some time now, and work our way up through the cooler gardening zones. Thanks for your patience, and enjoy the anticipation! We will send you an email when your bulbs leave here so that you'll have tracking information and an idea of when to expect them to arrive.

We'll keep taking new orders for several more weeks, but since varieties are selling out we'd suggest ordering soon for the best selection – check [our website](#) to see what is [currently available](#). Since we'll be spending most of our time out of the office during shipping season, placing your order online will get your bulbs reserved most quickly.

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### Mary Jane's Farm Magazine Raves About Our Dahlias

gardening with MaryJane

## DREAMY dahlias



ROSEMARY WEBB, 1956

Princessina Irene von Preussen, 1912

Wisconsin Red, 1910

Dahlias are summer- and fall-blooming tubers that are hardy in zones 7-11 (a low of about 0°F). In colder zones, they can be successfully planted each spring, then cut back and dug in the fall after the first frost. There are 42 species and over 50,000 named varieties of dahlias, producing one of the largest arrays of forms, colors, and sizes (and longest bloom season) of all flowers, ranging from tiny blossoms just 2" in diameter to colossal 18" "dinner-plate" blooms. And the best part? The more I pick mine to make bouquets, the more they bloom!

Dahlias were first grown in the mountain regions of Mexico by the Aztecs, and today are the national flower of Mexico. The Aztecs used dahlia tubers as a food staple (similar to the potato), but when Spanish conquistadors brought the plant to Europe, efforts to introduce it as a food crop there failed. But dahlia seeds and tubers were cultivated at the Royal Botanical Gardens in Madrid for their flowers, and were later distributed throughout Europe and brought back to the Americas.

Dahlias like full sun in light, slightly acidic soil (if your soil is heavy, add sand and peat moss to lighten it). But according to Dahlias.com, "Do not amend dahlia beds with purchased top soil or potting-mix soil unless you are sure that it has not been treated in any way for weeds or with fertilizer. This can burn your dahlias when they begin to sprout and cause them to not grow at all. The dahlias will do much better for you if you plant them in plain old dirt." After danger of frost passes, I plant my tubers about 6" deep and 24" apart, with each tuber lying horizontally and its eyes or stems (if visible) facing up. I like the taller varieties, so I stake mine at planting time. I bought 6' 2x2s at my local lumber yard, sharpened one end with an ax, and recruited my husband to help me pound them into the ground using a posthole driver. In between bouts of pounding a stake 2' deep, I held a level to the side to make sure the stake was staying plumb and upright. After the stakes were in, I dug a hole and planted my dahlias. As they grew, I used twine or bed sheets torn into 1" strips to tie the stems to the stakes. Experts say not to water the tubers until you see a sprout poking its head out (in hotter, drier climates, you may need to water lightly, but be aware that wet soil can cause tubers to rot). After sprouts appear, water deeply (30-60 minutes with a sprinkler) 2-3 times per week and feed once a month with a balanced rose, tomato, or general organic garden fertilizer. Pick bouquets or deadhead throughout the season to encourage more blooms.

I bought my tubers from Old House Gardens (OldHouseGardens.com, 734-995-1486) in Ann Arbor, Michigan, where I also found care instructions. They cultivate heirloom bulbs on five "micro farms" on vacant lots and other scraps of land within a few blocks of downtown Ann Arbor. Mine are disease-free, and if I must say so myself, stunning!

(continued)

SAMPLER, Old World Gardens

### WHY DO MY TUBERS ALL LOOK SO DIFFERENT?

If you order a variety of dahlias, you might be surprised that the tubers can look very different. Dahlias that are harvested for sale in the U.S. are traditionally divided into neatly trimmed, individual tubers (called "chicken legs") that can vary widely in appearance, just like the blooms. Plants from Holland are grown in pots and harvested in small clusters (called "pot roots"). All will grow equally well.

FASHION MINGER, 1955, Old World Gardens

KAISER WILHELM, 1885, Old World Gardens

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A warm welcome to our new customers who found us through the “Dreamy Dahlias” article in the April-May issue which is full of beautiful photographs and gardening advice. Though most of the ones she features have sold out already, many other varieties, to our minds just as lovely and deserving of your attention, are still available.

## Start Planning Soon for Fall Planting



Once your spring-blooming bulbs are up, and after you’ve simply enjoyed their beauty and exuberance, we recommend taking a walk through the garden with a

notepad and an eye to the future. Are there empty spaces you'd like to fill? Take a photograph with your phone as a reminder of the location, or mark it with some colored fish-tank gravel, so you'll have a reference point for planting next fall when neighboring plants may have hidden the spot. Did you try varieties that were experimental for you? Assess their performance and see if you want to increase their numbers or replace them with something else. Are there some old favorites that you love so much you must have more? We're happy to help with that too! As always, order early for the best selection: our fall bulbs are already available for ordering at our website and through our newest catalog.

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## Seasonal Tip: Fertilize Iris When Tulips Bloom



Like all plants, your iris will do better when their nutritional needs are met, and that usually means fertilizing them every now and then. Old-time wisdom suggests doing it when your tulips are blooming and we've found that to be a good indicator here. This is also a good time for doing a soil test, as over-fertilizing can cause long-term problems, but if you haven't fertilized in a while, you're probably safe doing it this spring. Some growers recommend a 6-10-10 fertilizer, while others prefer a balanced (10-10-10) one, but as long as it's slow-release and not high in nitrogen (the first number), most fertilizers will work just fine.

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## Last But Not Least: Some April Fool's Jokes in Honor of the Day



We take our customers and your gardens seriously, but here are a few bits of levity to make you smile, groan, or both:

What did April Fool's Day say when it won an award?

*Prank you!*

Why is everyone exhausted on April 1?

*Because they just had a 31-day March.*

Why do eggs like April Fool's Day?

*They love practical yolks.*

How do April flowers kiss?

*With their tu-lips!*

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