



Members' Newsletter – November, 2020

Welcome to the November edition of the Blofield & District Gardening Club Newsletter.

We have put together some information from the RHS - and the NNHS Autumn/Winter edition of The Gardener is attached.

If you have come across something that you think fellow members would like to see, please send it in to us : Blofieldgardeningclub@outlook.com

RHS Gardens remaining open during lockdown

All four RHS Gardens will remain open for you to enjoy during the new month-long lock-down across England. As large outside spaces, the RHS Gardens can be enjoyed safely by visitors with the safety measures that have been in place since reopening in June. This also means that the Garden centres will remain open during this time to ensure that you are well stocked with everything you need to keep growing over winter. You can also browse and buy online at rhsplants.co.uk and rhs.org.uk/shop. We are still waiting to hear from the government on whether our Glow illuminations can go ahead, we will be in touch with ticket holders directly once we have confirmation.

RHS Feature on Dahlias



With a wide choice of flower shapes and colours, dahlias are unrivalled for giving a showy display from summer into autumn. You can combine them with other late-flowering plants like salvias and grasses to boost late season borders, add dwarf cultivars for colour in summer containers or grow them in rows to give lots of cut flowers for your home.

Height ranges from compact (up to 30cm or 1ft), to stately at 1.5m (5ft) or more. Flowers can be open-centred and daisy-like or form complex 3D structures of tight spheres or jagged ruffles. Colours are diverse too; a spectrum from sedate pastels through to riotous reds and oranges.

Likes: Dahlias like free-draining soil in full sun and regular feeding to ensure the best flowering. Tie stems of taller cultivars, especially large-flowered ones, to canes driven into the ground.

Dislikes: Dahlias dislike strong winds and cold, wet soil. They're not hardy so root tubers will need protecting from sub-zero temperatures in winter.

Did you know? If you keep cutting flowers for indoor use, your plants will keep producing flowers until the first frosts. Cut flowers when fully opened as closed buds don't open after picking. Brown petals at the back of opened flowers are a sign of old age, so avoid these for the longest vase life.

Ongoing care

Staking: If your dahlia flower heads are large, you can put in stout posts, one per stem, and tie in these stems to stop plants flopping with the weight of the flowers. For smaller-flowered dahlias, you can put in bamboo canes (say at the four corners) and make a surrounding support basket with twine. Dwarf bedding dahlias won't need staking.

Watering: Dahlias need watering in dry and hot weather. Direct your can or hose to the base of the plant. Soak down to the roots once a week rather than watering shallowly more frequently.

Feeding: Apply granular, general purpose feed at planting time. Liquid feed at fortnightly intervals from early July to early September with a high-potassium feed, like tomato feed, to boost flowering. In summer containers, feed as you do your other container plants, usually weekly.

Deadheading: As flowers fade, deadhead them, cutting back the stems to a leaf joint. You will find older flowers have tatty petals at the back. Deadheading regularly (weekly) will encourage plants to produce more flowers.

End of season care: After a productive summer and early autumn, flowering inevitably slows down as temperatures drop. Dahlia foliage will be killed off by frost, but even before then, through October and November, the flowers get increasingly tatty and windblown. At the end of the season, you can either:

Leave in situ. Cut down stems and cover the tops of tubers (crowns) with a good 15cm (6in) of coarse mulch, like bark chip or garden compost, to protect from frost. This is a good option if you live in warmer parts of the country and have free-draining soil. Although there's always a risk of cold loss, it avoids the job of lifting and saves on storage space indoors.

Dig up and store tubers. This is the way to go if you grow on wet winter soil and live in colder parts of the country. Cut down the stems and lift the tubers. Shake off as much of the soil as possible and trim off any damaged tubers. Cut the stems back to about 5-15cm (2-6in) and store the tubers in shallow crates or open topped boxes. Surround them with an insulating material like dry potting compost or sand just over the crowns. It's best not to split tubers at this point as it'll make wounds which are vulnerable to rotting. Do this, instead, in spring when you're about to set them off into growth.



Store your tubers in a dark, cool but frost-free place like a shed or garage. During really cold spells put some fleece or newspaper over the top for added protection. Check them occasionally for signs of rot and remove any unhealthy ones.

If you've grown a dahlia seed mix, these will have developed tubers by the end of the season that can also be kept or stored. As seed-raised plants are genetically variable, you may only want to select the best to keep. You could then propagate identical plants by taking cuttings from them next year.

Propagating: Start tubers into growth in early spring (February) indoors in a shallow tray of potting compost. When shoots are 2-3cm (about an inch) tall, divide the tubers. Make sure each section has both roots and shoots. Pot each section into a separate container and grow on in frost-free conditions until they are ready to plant out in late May/early June.

Alternatively, take **basal softwood** or **softwood cuttings** from tubers brought into growth with some heat in a greenhouse in late winter to early spring. As these cuttings root and grow, you'll need to move them into bigger pots and keep them in a greenhouse until you can plant out young plants in late May/early June.

Bedding dahlias, often sold in colour mixes, are easily grown from [seed sown indoors](#). When seedlings are large enough, prick out into modules or small containers and liquid feed every two weeks, planting out after acclimatising (hardening off) in late May/early June. Once they flower, you can select your favourites and save their tubers to grow next year.

If you are planting dormant tubers straight into the ground in April, sometimes, a large clump falls apart into separate pieces or can be helped with a snip from your secateurs. Again, with this later division, just make sure there's a green bud at the top of the piece of tuber and plant these straight into the ground.

Grow your own: Make your own compost

Home-made compost is a really useful soil improver for the veg patch. As leaves are falling and plants are dying back for the winter, now's the perfect time to gather as much as you can to put on your compost heap. Lawn mowings mixed in will help leaves break down more quickly.

Below is a rather long link to an interesting RHS article about composting.

https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/profile?pid=444&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=ALL%20MEMBER%20-%20Weekly%20Member%20Newsletter%20-%206%20November&utm_content=ALL%20MEMBER%20-%20Weekly%20Member%20Newsletter%20-%206%20November%20CID_6a944fec47744c84e724260e39658fff&utm_source=marketing%20newsletters&utm_term=Find%20out%20how

Composting in action! This is how the Club's experts do it!



Rose Pruning – another set of tips from the RHS

Rambling roses: Rose pruning ensures that plants grow vigorously and flower well each year. If left, rambling roses can become a tangled mess of branches with very few flowers. Although often considered complicated, rose pruning is not difficult if you follow this guide.

How to prune rambling roses: Rose pruning can be covered in some [general tips](#) and in more specific detail depending on the maturity of the rambler;

Formative training and pruning of ramblers: After planting, prune stems back to 40cm (16in) Remove any dead, damaged or twiggy growth. Carefully train the shoots by fanning them out and tie in new stems horizontally

Routine pruning of ramblers: When supports have been covered, thin and shorten excessive growth by removing one in three of the oldest stems entirely.

If space is restricted, prune out all stems that have flowered and tie new ones in to take their place. Finish by shortening side shoots by about two-thirds

Renovating overgrown ramblers: Remove all dead, diseased, dying and weak shoots. Cut some of the old woody branches to the ground, retaining a maximum of six young, vigorous stems that can be secured to supports

Blofield & District Gardening Club: the November competition

A small floral decoration for the Christmas table



Courtesy of our chair lady: June Drake

There is not usually a December meeting of the Club, but if members would like to send in an article for a December newsletter, or photographs of your garden / vegetables / winter wonderland / anything at all – then please do. E-mail: blofieldgardeningclub@outlook.com

It would also be a good opportunity for Club members to send their best wishes for the Christmas season to colleagues, so I am proposing that the December competition should be:

A Christmas message to Club members

This could include a drawing, photograph, poem or just your sincere seasonal wishes. Go on, have a go!

None of us knows what 2021 will bring, Covid-19 and Club meeting wise. It may well be that the vaccines being produced will prove efficacious and become available over the winter / spring months, so people may feel confident to meet up together again.

The first Club meeting is always the Annual General Meeting, planned for Wednesday, 10th March, 2021. The committee will be in touch nearer the time to confirm whether this can go ahead at the Margaret Harker Hall, is postponed, or perhaps even held via Zoom (!)

In the meantime, all members of the Committee hope that you are keeping safe and well, and finding new things to keep you occupied (*have you got a copy of the latest seed catalogue?*)

Please send something in for the December Newsletter to show others you are thinking of them too.

With very best wishes to you all,

Blofield & District Gardening Club Committee www.blofieldgardeningclub.org.uk