



STORING TENDER BULBS FOR THE WINTER

Many common summer flowering bulbs like gladiolus, dahlia, begonias, cannas and others will not survive our cold winters.

Container grown bulbs may be overwintered in their pots, and after cutting back the foliage, can be stored in a cool dry place. Bulbs in the ground must be "lifted" or dug up, and then stored. A spading fork is best for digging bulbs, rather than a spade as there will be less chance of damage.

Whether in a container or in the ground you don't need to bring the bulbs in for storage until after the first light frost. The leaves should begin to blacken or yellow after this first touch of winter. If a hard freeze is predicted (in the 20's) the bulbs should be dug even if their foliage is still green.

Hints on Specific Bulbs

Begonias

After a light frost, when leaves begin to yellow, dig the bulbs. Start with the spading fork about a foot away from the center of the clump to avoid damaging the tuber.

Method 1

Don't remove all the soil from around the root ball. Place the root ball in a container with slightly moist potting soil. Allow this soil to dry out, while you continue to remove leaves and stems as they dry out and separate easily from the tuber. When no parts are visible above the soil, the tubers can be dug up. Wash the soil off and check the bulbs for signs of rot, which can be cut away as you would do on a potato. Dust the cut surfaces with a bulb fungicide and dry for 2 to 3 days. Store one inch deep in slightly moist potting soil (not topsoil) or vermiculite. Store at 40 to 50 degrees in the dark.

Method 2

After digging, allow the bulbs to cure a few days in the sun until they are hard and dry. Remove all portions of stems from tuber. Store in open flats in cool dry spot as above.

Dahlias

After frost when leaves begin to yellow, cut the stalk to 6 inches. Dig the clump of tubers and dry in the sun for several hours. You can also leave the clumps in the ground for an additional week after cutting them back which allows new "eyes" to begin to form. This will make it easier to divide the tubers in the fall if you choose to do it then.

Dividing in the fall is easier for 2 reasons: the tubers are easier to cut, and the buds are easy to see. There is more chance, however, that the bulbs will dry out in storage or they will rot, so be sure to dust the bulbs at this time.

To divide, cut down the main stalk and between the tubers, making sure that each portion has at least one bud. Dust and store in slightly moist potting soil or vermiculite in heavy cardboard boxes or plastic bags with holes poked in them. Don't allow tubers to touch, and store at 40 to 50 degrees in a well ventilated, dark area.

Cannas

After frost, cut stems back to a few inches. Let air dry for a few hours in a shady area. Storage of cannas is somewhat simpler than for begonias or dahlias. The clumps can be stored in a container with the soil still on them, at 40 to 50 degrees, or store stem side down in dry peat or vermiculite.

Gladiolus

Six weeks or so after blooming, and before the leaves yellow, dig up the corms. Cut off the stems just above the top of the corm. Dust the bulbs and allow to dry in a dark, well ventilated place at 60 to 70 degrees for about 3 weeks. At this time it should be easy to remove the old corm and roots. The newly formed corms can then be stored in paper bags at 40 to 50 degrees.