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Harvesting and Storing Bulbs for the Winter

Bulbs such as dahlias, gladiolas, cannas, begonias, freesias, callas, and caladiums must be dug up and stored over the winter. Here is a step by step guide on how to successfully ensure that your bulbs make it through the winter.

Harvesting

Harvest the bulbs after the foliage turns yellow in the fall. It is okay to wait until after the first hard frost, but do not leave the bulbs in below freezing soil for a long period of time.

Start by cutting back the foliage, leaving only a couple of inches standing above the ground. Use a pitchfork or shovel to dig around the tubers, maintaining a safe distance to make sure you do not damage the roots. Lift the tuber out of the ground and gently shake it to remove excess dirt.

After removing the bulbs from the ground, shake off the loose soil and allow them to dry out in a shady, protected spot with good air circulation for about a week. Brush off any remaining soil, and lightly dust with a fungicide to help control any potential diseases.

Storing

The bulbs can be stored in a shallow tray or bag with perlite or vermiculite. This keeps them from drying out yet allows them to breathe. Place them in a cool (35°-50°F) place with good air circulation and zero risk of freezing. Good storage spots include crawl spaces, root cellars, or garages.

Check frequently during the winter to ensure that the medium is not dry. You may put a few drops of water in the medium to keep the bulbs from completely drying out.

Replanting

The bulbs can go directly into the ground when there is no longer a risk of frost. A good guideline is to plant them at the same time you would plant a tomato. If you want blooms as early as possible, start the plants indoors with good lighting about a month before planting time.

