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HARVESTING DAHLIAS AND CANNAS

Now that fall is here, many gardeners are concerned about the storage of their dahlia and canna roots. Dahlias and cannas can be dug as soon as the new roots have formed and are of reasonably good size. The roots should be fleshy and firm. It's not necessary for the dahlias or cannas to have been subjected to frost before digging. However, many gardeners do prefer to leave them in the garden just as long as possible.

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Dahlia roots should be dug carefully so as not to injure or break the turgid roots. Lift the clump very carefully and wash off excess soil with a hard spray of the garden hose. Cut off the tops and turn the clumps upside down to dry in a cool, well ventilated area. Only mature roots should be stored. They may be packed in sphagnum moss or vermiculite or placed in perforated plastic bags.

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Cannas are handled similarly. It's advisable to cut the stems down to 4 inches and leave them attached to the storage rhizome. Remove all excess soil by washing with the hose. Cure the bulbs by placing them in a well ventilated room from one to two weeks. Cannas store best in an air humidity of 85 percent, with the temperature between 38° and 40° F. If the room humidity is low, the roots should be packed in sand or vermiculite to prevent shriveling.

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