

A Quick Guide To Storing Bulbs

Tender, summer-flowering bulbous plants such as dahlias, gladioli, tuberous begonias and cannas provide a profusion of colorful, fragrant flowers and lush foliage all summer.

Although these exotic tropicals love our hot, tropic-like summers, they are not frost-hardy and can't tolerate our cold Long Island winters without protection. We must either consider them annuals (which don't come back each year) or dig them up in the fall, store them for winter, and replant them in spring when all danger of frost has passed.

For convenience, the term "bulb" is loosely used here to describe the fleshy underground roots, stems and plant parts known as tubers, rhizomes, corms, tuber-corms and true bulbs.

Is it all worth it?

Is all the work and effort worth it? Well, most bulbs will get bigger and better season after season if stored properly and, with dahlias and cannas, you will get more and more each year to enlarge your displays or give away to friends and neighbors.

On the other hand, many gardeners treat summer flowering bulbs as annuals and don't bother lifting and storing bulbs in the fall. Newly purchased bulbs and roots will perform just about as well as the ones saved and provide opportunities to change color schemes and varieties.

Lifting and Storing Bulbs

1. When the bulbs are ready to be lifted in the fall, (refer to the list below for your variety), cut back the stems to about 4 - 6 inches from the ground.
2. Carefully dig up and lift the bulbs or clumps. Clean off the soil. Let them dry for a few days in a shady, frost-free area. Keep any clumps together for storage; they can be divided before planting next season.
3. Treat the bulbs with a fungicide such as dusting sulfur or bulb dust to prevent rotting in storage.
4. Label your bulbs or clumps and pack them in a box filled with vermiculite, perlite, peat moss or another similar medium. For certain bulbs, the packing material should be slightly moist; others like it dry. See the list below for your variety. Try not to let the bulbs touch one another.

5. Store box in a place where temperature stays between 40 and 55 degrees F and is frost-free.
6. Check your bulbs regularly throughout winter. Check for mildew or rotting. If any appears, scrape it out and dust the wounds with sulfur. Make sure the packing material stays slightly moist for those bulbs that require moisture during storage; add water if needed.

Supply List

- ✓ A box – cardboard, wood or plastic
- ✓ Labels
- ✓ Packing material – perlite, vermiculite or peat moss
- ✓ Sulfur or Bulb Dust

Caladium

Lift: Before hard frost, as the leaves decline (October)

Storage Temp: 55-70 F (ideal: 55-65 F)

Moisture: Very dry (use perlite or vermiculite)

Special note: Roots live a long time and get larger and better with each passing season.

Canna

Lift: After hard frost (early to mid-November)

Storage Temp: 45-65 F (ideal: 45-55 F)

Moisture: Barely damp (peat moss works best)

Special note: Divide clumps before planting. Treat wounds with sulfur dust.

Dahlia

Lift: 2 weeks after foliage is killed off or blackened by frost (mid-November)

Storage Temp: 35-55 F (ideal: 40-50 F)

Moisture: barely damp (peat moss works best)

Special note: Divide clumps before planting. Treat wounds with sulfur dust.

Elephant Ear (Colocasia)

Lift: Before hard frost as leaves decline (October)

Storage Temp: 55-70 F (ideal: 55-65 F)

Moisture: very dry (use perlite or vermiculite)

Special note: Roots live a long time and gradually get larger and better with each passing season.

Gladiola

Lift: Before hard frost as leaves decline (October)

Storage Temp: 35-55 F (ideal: 40-50 F)

Moisture: very dry (use perlite or vermiculite)

Special note: Storage works well for 2-3 years, after that corms will begin to decline. Buy new corms or grow new ones from cormels found when digging. Cormels will reach bloom size in a season or two.

Tuberous Begonia

Lift: After hard frost (early to mid-November)

Storage Temp: 45-60 F (ideal: 55-60 F)

Moisture: Very dry (use perlite or vermiculite)

Special note: Begonia tubers gradually get better each year for about eight years, then they die. Replace with newly purchased tubers.

STORING BULBS OVER THE WINTER

