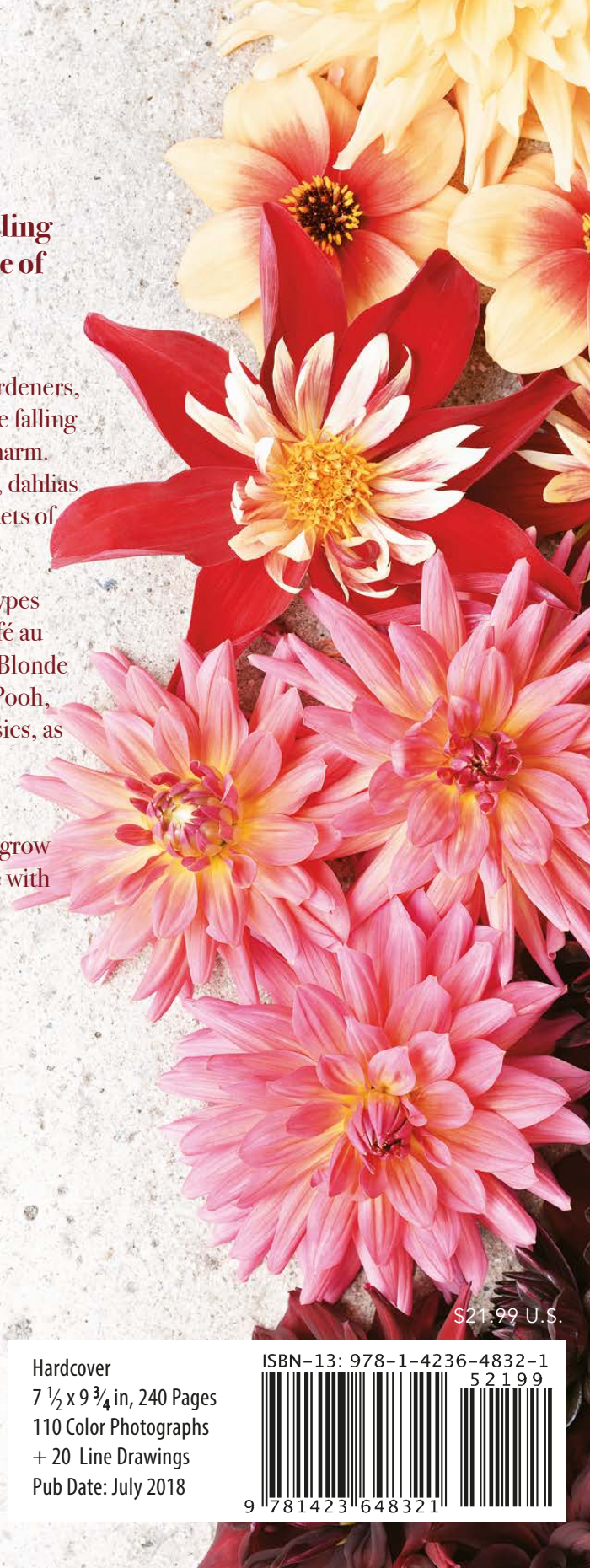


***Dahlias* is a celebration of the dazzling colors and flamboyant forms of one of the world's favorite flowers.**

Dahlias are back in vogue. Professional gardeners, florists, and hobbyists around the world are falling in love again with this flower's eccentric charm. From sumptuous petals to floral fireworks, dahlias are taking over as the focus piece in bouquets of every kind.

This stunning collection profiles over 65 types of dahlia. From the billowing beauty of Café au Lait and the luminously delicate Platinum Blonde to the spiny Black Narcissus and cheerful Pooh, you'll discover a splendid selection of classics, as well as the best modern varieties.

Lush photography augments the expert commentary and no-fuss advice on how to grow these botanical beauties and fill your home with spectacular cut flowers. Whether you have a lavish garden or a simple container, lose yourself in the enduring charm of dahlias.



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+ 20 Line Drawings
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DAHLIAS

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photography by
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GIBBS
SMITH

NAOMI SLADE
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DAHLIAS

beautiful varieties for home and garden



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THE HISTORY AND BOTANY OF DAHLIAS

CONQUERORS OF FAR-FLUNG PLACES USUALLY TAKE WITH THEM A FAIRLY PREDICTABLE SHOPPING LIST. LAND, GOLD AND EMPIRE ARE ALL HIGHLY ACCEPTABLE PRIZES. THERE CAN BE ALL MANNER OF ESOTERIC ADD-ONS, SUCH AS NEW FOODS OR EXOTIC SPICES, WHICH MIGHT CONFER AN ECONOMIC ADVANTAGE. BUT VERY OFTEN, THE PLUCKY EXPLORERS MAKE OTHER DISCOVERIES, TOO.

When the conquistadors arrived in Mexico and Central America in 1525, they found the indigenous people collecting and cultivating an intriguing local flower. Known as *acocotli* or *cocoxochitl* in the languages of the region, it had hollow stems that were perfect for piping water, and the name could be loosely translated as “the water-pipe plant.”

The plant was also used therapeutically to treat epilepsy and the plump tuber was exploited as a food crop by the Aztecs. It is likely that the hopeful explorers may have sent it to Spain as a potential rival to that other notable tuber, the potato. But while the new plant looked better in bloom, it lacked merit in the kitchen and was quietly forgotten until 1570, when physician Francisco Hernández de Toledo was ordered to Mexico by King Philip II to study its plants.

Reporting back, Hernández described two dahlia types, a single flower similar to *Dahlia pinnata* and the enormous *Dahlia imperialis*. His account, illustrated by Francisco Domínguez, also shows other dahlias. These bear a resemblance to the species *Dahlia merckii* and the modern bedding dahlia, and,

from the drawing, some of them are clearly partially double.

Yet, surprisingly, dahlias did not reach Europe until 1789, when Vicente Cervantes, Director of the Botanical Garden in Mexico City, sent plant material to Antonio José Cavanilles, Director of the Royal Gardens in Madrid. The new genus was named to honor the Swedish botanist Anders Dahl, who had died that year, and as the plants flowered, Cavanilles identified three species. These he named *Dahlia pinnata*, after its pinnate foliage, *D. rosea* for its pinky-purple bloom, and *D. coccinea* for its scarlet color.

Cavanilles distributed seeds and tubers of his exciting new flower to botanic and university gardens in France, Italy, Switzerland and Britain. Diplomatic routes may also have played a part in their spread. The Marchioness of Bute, wife of the British Ambassador to Spain, is said to have sent seeds of *Dahlia coccinea* to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 1798, although the plants died. A few years later, in 1804, Lady Holland, wife of the British Ambassador in Madrid, received dahlias from Cavanilles which she sent back to Holland



L'Ancrese

For a simple, pure, classic dahlia, it is hard to beat L'Ancrese. Prolific and perfect, the white globes are borne on long, strong, straight stems so they float above the foliage of this relatively tall plant.

L'Ancrese is a place on the northern side of Guernsey in the Channel Islands, an area of pristine golden sands and turquoise sea. It is not known whether the name refers to an anchorage or a hermitage long-lost in time. However, it is rather appealing to associate this pristine dahlia with a life of monastic solitude and contemplation.

Despite being introduced in the 1980s, the virginal blooms have an antique quality, possessed of a formality and charm that lends itself to bridal bouquets. Whether bound tightly with white or blush rosebuds, or in a relaxed, modern arrangement with foliage and other white dahlias, L'Ancrese is simple and beautiful. Some flowers have a teasing hint of lilac that takes them just one step away from unapproachable purity and this makes them the perfect companions when walking down the aisle.

Flower type: Miniature Ball or Small Ball

Average height: 48 in

Average spread: 24 in

Flower size: to 4 in

Foliage: Green

Staking: Yes

As a cut flower: Long, strong, straight stems mean it is excellent for cutting and perfect for weddings and hand-tied bouquets

In the garden: Good

Alternative varieties: Boom Boom White, Eveline, White Aster

FABULOUS AND FUNKY





Taratahi Ruby

This gorgeous little gem from New Zealand bears prolific scarlet-orange flowers and was honored with a Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit in 2000. The tidy, regular blooms have a twist of mandarin and lime at the center, and are carried on maroon stems.

Taratahi Ruby is a vigorous and healthy plant that adapts itself to all sorts of situations. It cuts well for floristry and acquits itself well on the show bench, too. In the garden, it looks particularly beautiful beaded with dew.

Plant in a border with other hot-colored flowers such as orange zinnias and darker red dahlias over a smoldering carpet of nasturtiums. Or use it as a pop of color in a cooler scheme, with soft grasses such as *Calamagrostis* × *acutiflora* 'Karl Foerster' and *Pennisetum villosum*, and gentle pink-green sedums. The neat flowers also look pretty with other dahlias, cut as single stems in small multi-colored vases.

Flower type: Small Waterlily

Average height: 48 in

Average spread: 24 in

Flower size: 4–6 in

Foliage: Mid-green

Staking: Yes

As a cut flower: Superb

In the garden: Combine with other plants to soften its leggy qualities. Its robust shade of red looks great in a hot border or contrasted with dark foliage

Alternative varieties: Maks Royal Ruby, Karma Irene, Edwin's Sunset



Sierra Glow

This flower is a supermodel of the dahlia world. Tall, elegant plants with long, strong stems carry blooms of the most gorgeous bronze, brushed with coppery pink and with hints of dusty rose. It is a very plush creature indeed, glossy and polished, with its huge, richly petaled flowers the epitome of desirability and the very height of fashion.

In the garden, it's a stunner partnered with blue agapanthus or tall, tawny grasses. Cut this dahlia liberally and use as single stems in lavish, single-variety bouquets or as a striking addition to mixed arrangements.

Flower type: Large Decorative

Average height: 60–72 in

Average spread: 28 in

Flower size: 8–10 in

Foliage: Green

Staking: Yes, essential

As a cut flower: Elegant and sophisticated

In the garden: A beautiful addition

Alternative varieties: Café au Lait is a creamier version and just as glamorous, while Labyrinth is less cool in color



Fire Magic

This show-stopping American-bred dahlia was introduced in 1991 and has captivated and enthralled its public ever since. Like a nuclear sunset, it is a spectacular combination of smoky fuchsia-pink and orange, bleeding to a magenta center. The petals are yellow-green at the base and dusted with gold, giving the flower an otherworldly metallic sheen.

Wildly floriferous, it flames and crackles magnificently in the border and is spectacular in a vase. A bold and unusual beauty, it might literally draw moths to its flame and make sunflowers want to retire, but it is sweet and gentle at heart.

Grow with single, hot-pink dahlias and with dark red flowers or foliage for a riot of color.

Flower type: Small Semi-Cactus

Average height: 54 in

Average spread: 24 in

Flower size: 4–6 in

Foliage: Green

Staking: Yes

As a cut flower: Very good

In the garden: Stands out from the crowd and is a good back-of-the border plant

Alternative varieties: Waltzing Mathilda, Wannabee, Hollyhill Margarita







Series

Happy Single

Brought to us by Dutch dahlia breeders Kees and Aad Verwer, the same people who introduced the Gallery Series of dahlias, the Happy Single Series is utterly delightful. At a height of 12–24 inches and with spreads of 12–16 inches, they are versatile in smaller spaces and all have airy, finely cut dark foliage that provides a very fashionable foil for other plants.

As a collection, the Happy Singles – as they are fondly known – capture the richness of color and simple joy of the single form. They have the exuberant look of a haphazard collection of seedlings, but careful breeding means that they achieve this apparently artless nirvana without the dud varieties that random genetic recombination inevitably brings.

The ever-increasing number of varieties includes Happy Single Flame, Happy Single Party, Happy Single Princess and Happy Single First Love. The petal colors vary, but they tend to bleed and intensify to a richly colored halo around a contrasting central boss.

Perfect combined in borders or in a container collection, the open flowers are very attractive to butterflies and bees. Dwarf they may be, but in the garden, they are giants.

Rip City

With compelling good looks, this black-crimson dahlia has stolen a lot of hearts in its time and when you see it in the garden on an early autumn morning, a symphony of rich, ruffled, berry colors, darkest in the center and fading to magenta as the petals age, it is easy to see why.

The name Rip City is a nickname for Portland, Oregon, and is specifically associated with the National Basketball Association team, the Portland Trail Blazers. In 1971, the Blazers were up against powerful adversaries when a wildly ill-advised long shot dramatically went home. In the heat of the moment, the announcer shouted “Rip City! All right!” – and the name stuck.

And when it comes to drama, Rip City does not sell the crowds short. Vigorous and lush in growth, the fully double flowers have petals that recurve for more than half of their length, giving the bloom a slightly louche appearance.

Flower type: Small Semi-Cactus (sometimes sold as an Informal Decorative)

Average height: 40–44 in

Average spread: 32 in

Flower size: 4–6 in

Foliage: Dark green

Staking: Ideally

As a cut flower: Good

In the garden: Fantastic and dramatic

Alternative varieties: Chat Noir, Orfeo

