

Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

Meets second Tuesday of the month at Rose City Park United Methodist Church, 5830 N.E. Alameda

Website: portlanddahlia.com

Editor: Mike Riordan (503)256-0425 Contacts: Larry Smith thebodysmith@hotmail.com, Jeanette Benson (503) 649-4118

Next meeting Tuesday, June 11th, 2013 @ 7:30 PM

SOCIETY NEWS

Thanks to all the volunteers who worked so hard on all of our tuber and plant sale fundraisers. Thanks to all the growers that generously donated their tubers, plants, time, packaging, printing and labeling materials. Special thanks to Swan Island Dahlias for use of their facilities for the two tuber packing work parties. We hope to have a financial report available at the meeting so we can see exactly where we stand.

COOKIES FOR JUNE

Treat host for June are Teresa Bergman and Linda Taylor.

PROGRAM FOR JUNE

Wayne Lobaugh will present an outline of how he manages automatic watering in his commercial dahlia garden. Sounds like useful information for the busy dahlia grower.

JUNE IN THE DAHLIA GARDEN

By Max Ollieu

June is really a busy month for me in my dahlia garden. Since my choice is to start my tubers in one gallon plastic pots, they need to be transplanted to my garden the latter part of May as well as much of June. Even cuttings I have been able to obtain have been repotted and need transplanting as well. So, much of the month is spent digging holes and transplanting the best of the new starts. This year, I will be transplanting about 80% of my new crop. The rest will go to friends or be discarded. I begin my monthly applications of Messenger June first and plan to continue those applications through September first. In my opinion, Messenger helps provide better and stronger tuber crops, resistance to the effects of disease organisms such as powdery mildew and tuber rot, and enhances above ground plant health and size. Application of fertilizer in June is a heaping tablespoon of slow release nitrogen in each hole since my phosphorus and potassium levels are already adequate for my garden. I also start my applications of

insecticide in June and plan to alternate between Orthene and Wisdom (Bifenthrin) which is a cheaper product than Talstar, also a Bifenthrin product. Of course, my worst pest is the slug, so heavy applications of slug bait are made as soon as plants are placed in the garden as well as patrols morning and evening to manually control any slugs found approaching the garden.

The plants also need to be groomed in terms of topping and bottoming (my term). Topping for me means removing the terminal buds on the main stem to encourage growth of laterals. Bottoming to me means removal of the laterals lowest to the ground to allow for air circulation as well as room for the mulch to be added in July. Mainly though, I need to get the right number of laterals for the particular dahlia variety being grown. Lateral management is extremely important for those of us trying to grow our best show dahlias and I work hard to keep to the number I have selected for each variety essentially to the last show.

I grow my mignon singles and peony type dahlias in large containers. Since both types are small, it's nice to have them elevated for deadheading. Also, they don't have to compete with larger dahlias and grass. Fortunately, they seem to do just fine in large containers.



Trooper Dan Photo

TOPPING OUT

Sometime this month growers generally pinch out, top out or 'stop out' their dahlia plants. This tends to create a bushier plant with more blooms at their prime simultaneously. Most published materials suggest allowing 2 to 4 laterals to develop for AA and A's, 4 to 6 laterals for B's, 6 to 8 laterals for BB's and 8 or more for Miniatures. By directing the plant's energy through stopping, disbranching and disbudding, growers are rewarded with superior blooms in every respect. As Max mentions in his article, you most likely won't allow all laterals which form to continue growing. By way of example, if you have a plant of *Kenora Jubilee*, with four sets of developed leaves, one has the possibility of eight laterals developing after pinching out the growth tip. Far better to allow the top four laterals to develop and remove those developing lower on the plant. By removing the lower laterals you have less chance of mildew and hard to reach insects becoming an issue.

DOS AND DON'TS

Do try to manage healthy plant growth by allowing only one sprout to grow from each tuber. If multiple sprouts are allowed to grow, they tend to compete with each other resulting in smaller flowers and generally weaker growth. Don't remove the unwanted sprouts by pulling on them. I did this at one time, until I managed to break the neck of the only tuber of a new and expensive variety. Pinching or cutting works fine. Pulling, a definite no-no.



Clearview Claret Photo

Do water green plants to keep them growing vigorously. A liquid fertilizer at half strength administered weekly will also keep them growing strong. During periods of hot weather, this could make all the difference in healthy plants vs. throwing them into a stalled, shocked state where they are apt to express viral symptoms. If you have tubers and green plants growing together hand watering the green plants is the preferred option. If during the middle of June the ground begins to dry out a bit, one can start overhead watering. Using an oscillating

sprinkler, the gardener can simulate a refreshing spring shower. Morning showers as opposed to evening showers would be less conducive to powdery mildew. When the plants reach about a foot high, I usually put out the drip tape and begin watering in the normal manner. At this point all overhead watering is discontinued.

Every year it seems that some varieties begin looking virused that have never shown symptoms previously. Tell-tale oak leaf or mosaic patterns in lighter yellow on the foliage or yellowing along the foliage mid-rib may indicate stock that should be culled. Some yellow spotting of the leaves can be caused by insect damage (e.g., thrips) and is not to be confused with disease. If you look on the undersides of the leaves you can see where the insects entered to cause their damage. If you are not sure if a plant is diseased, you might want to ask the opinion of a more experienced grower or bring a leaf sample to our meeting.

Dahlia smut is a curable fungus disease that at first symptom looks like dahlia ring spot virus. If left unchecked, the spots will rot all the way through the foliage giving a "shot hole" appearance. The smut is likely to occur in the same areas of the garden each season as the fungus winters over in the soil. It seems to be most prevalent in June in our area. *Daconil* is an effective fungicide against dahlia smut available to the home gardener.

The rotting mother tuber phenomenon usually happens this month. You may have a strong healthy plant that suddenly, inexplicably begins to wilt. Usually, this means the mother tuber is decomposing. The plant will attempt to survive by growing new side roots, but this takes a little time. To help Mother Nature along, try shading the plant on the South and West sides with a piece of cardboard about a foot square held in place by three stakes per side.

Replanting is a seldom discussed subject. But nothing ever works out perfectly. And some plants don't grow and others need to be culled because they are diseased. If the dahlia grower has a few extra green plants, they come in handy for this purpose. A few extra tubers growing individually in pots for this specific purpose work out equally well. Having extra stock for the express purpose of replanting also makes one more apt to cull the plants you know deep down you need to cull.

Recently there has been some discussion among experienced growers about the use of Epsom Salts (Magnesium Sulfate). The consensus seems to be that the magnesium helps unlock other nutrients and make these nutrients more available to the plants. Another grower reports that using Epsom Salts greatly improved the keeping quality of his tubers over winter. I'd be a bit cautious with the application rate initially, starting with maybe a teaspoon per plant around the drip line. You can always add a little more later, but it is difficult for plants to recover from too much of just about anything.

PEARLS FROM THE PAST

Cultivation and the manner in which it is done spell the difference between success and failure in growing dahlias. Cultivation is placed ahead of watering as with proper preparation and cultivation of the soil, moisture can be conserved but watering without cultivation is worse than no watering at all. There is no truer adage than “the hoe is mightier than the hose”. *Editor’s note: A garden rake works even better than a hoe to cultivate and loosen the soil. The soil is raked around the plants and the paths themselves between the rows are also raked.*

Cultivation should be started as soon as the shoots are far enough out of the ground to mark the rows. The object is three fold, to break the crust and conserve moisture, to allow aeration of the soil and to destroy the weeds which take food and moisture from the plants. Cultivation should be shallow until the plants are up a few inches after which it should be worked several inches deep until the plants are a couple of feet high or until the buds start to show. Cultivation should always be shallow close to the plants to avoid injury to the feeder roots. By the time the buds start to show the fine feeder roots will fill most of the space between the rows and deep cultivation should cease. From then on cultivation should only be deep enough to keep a dust mulch on top. Many growers make it a practice to always float the ground after cultivating as it helps to prevent evaporation of the moisture. A crust should never be allowed to form as this will permit the soil to dry out in a very short time. The ground should be stirred at least once every two weeks and should always be worked as soon after a rain as the top surface dries out sufficiently. The hoe is the implement most used in the small garden for cultivation and is always needed to remove weeds from around the plants in any planting. After the plants get well started, a rake may be substituted for the hoe for close work as it is not so apt to injure the fine roots.

From *Practical Dahlia Culture* published by the Portland Dahlia Society in 1946.

DAHLIA MYTHS DEBUNKED

By Ted J. Kennedy

Myth (1) Dahlias do not need a fertilizer with much nitrogen as this causes tall leggy plants and few flowers. The origins of this myth probably originated in instructions to growers to not put too much nitrogen on dahlias late in the season as this may cause the tubers to rot in storage. Dahlias like all plants with green leaves need nitrogen to grow. They need it especially during the time they growing to their full height. Professional and avid gardeners get their soil tested by agricultural laboratories. Nitrogen is difficult to retain in the soil during the winter months in our rainy climate. Soil tests in the spring confirm this but phosphorous and to some

extent potassium do not wash out of the soil. If you have been growing dahlias in the same area for several years and have fertilized with a “balanced” fertilizer that has all of the three NPK elements, the phosphorous and potassium will be retained in your soil and you need a fertilizer with mostly nitrogen. That is just the opposite of the nitrogen and dahlias myth.

Dahlias need nitrogen to grow into healthy plants and need it during the first half of the growing season. It is true that too much nitrogen causes tubers to rot and little or no nitrogen fertilizer should be given to dahlias after about August 1st. So the formula for fertilizing dahlias is to give them the nutrients they need to grow into full sized plants in the first half of the season and then when they are full sized plants in August there is enough residual fertilizer in the soil to take them through the entire year.

And dahlias that have the proper amounts of nitrogen (and even excessive nitrogen) are not spindly or leggy but quite the opposite. And there is no shortage of good flowers either. Competition exhibitors know this and they use lots of nitrogen to grow their champion flowers. They also know that the tubers from their over fertilized plants may not store well.

Myth (2) Dahlias should not be dug until there has been a killing frost

Here in the Portland area in 2012 there was no killing frost until January of 2013. Had you followed this myth, many of your tubers could have been drowned by our winter rains. Dahlias in the Portland can be dug any time in October or November. Even though the plants may still be green, the stalks should be cut off at about 6 inches and the tubers clumps dug a few days after that. Cutting off the stalks causes the tuber eyes to swell making the dividing of tuber clumps easier. Dahlias dug in October tend to store better for many growers because the soil is drier. Wet soil contributes to poor dahlia tuber storage.

Myth (3) Dahlias can be left in the ground for the season in the Portland area and this will result in superior, early blooming plants.

The 2012-2013 winter was exceptionally mild. Nearly every dahlia that was left in the ground in our garden sprouted and is growing very well. Well, that is opinion of the slugs that nearly ate them completely before we added slug bait. This was an exceptionally mild winter and it was very dry in January through April. In most years, either the winter temperatures or the wet weather will kill many of the dahlias left in the ground.

Ted
e4449@aol.com