

# Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

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

Website: [portlanddahlia.com](http://portlanddahlia.com)

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**Next meeting Tuesday, June 14<sup>th</sup>, 2016 @ 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 the Gitts Family and 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. Preliminary estimates put us ahead of last year.

## **COOKIES FOR JUNE**

Treat hosts for June are Jeanette Benson and Mike Riordan

## **PROGRAM FOR JUNE**

Our program will include a discussion on watering, mulching and shading plants. A presentation on pest, weed and disease control will follow. We also hope to have a few more green plants donated for auction as many members report having a shortage of tubers to plant and a need to fill-ins for no shows

## **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. 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.



*Gitts Perfection*

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. Don't dig up the plant to investigate. 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.*



*Photo: Beep Beep*

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 form 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

## MARGARET ELLEN GITTS

From the *Oregonian*, Sunday, May 29, 2016:

Margaret Ellen Gitts passed away peacefully May 17, 2016, in her sleep with family at her bedside in Canby. A celebration of life will be held from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m. Wednesday, June 8, 2016, at the Willamette Valley Country Club in Canby.

From the American Dahlia Society by Alan Fisher, ADS Membership Vice-President:

### In Loving Memory

Marge Gitts, who owned Swan Island Dahlias in Canby, OR with her late husband Nicholas, sons Nick and Ted, and the rest of a large family, passed away May 17. Her son Ted pre-deceased her in 2013 after a terrible car crash.

The Gitts family purchased Swan Island probably at least 50 years ago. This enterprise, which occupies several generations of family members, is by far the largest dahlia enterprise in North America. When we visited, there were countless long rows, each with a different cultivar, forming a colorful field as far as one could see. The property contains numerous garages, each with tables set with large containers of each dahlia cultivar. The Gitts family changes the blooms in the displays every day during the Swan Island festival, which runs in late August and much of September.

With her close friend Jeanette Benson, ADS Representative of the Portland Dahlia Society, Marge would make up extensive commercial displays of Swan Island introductions at ADS National Shows and at regional dahlia shows in the Northwest.

The Gitts family have been Benefactor members of ADS for all 23 years that ADS has had this special category recognizing members who donate extra to help support the society. Swan Island has also sold some ADS publications and referred many of its customers to the American Dahlia Society. The Gitts family also donated land on the Swan Island property for the American Dahlia Society Canby Trial Garden, which the Portland Dahlia Society runs very successfully.

Marge was a Lady in the old fashioned sense. Linda Holmes-Cook, whose family has been close with the Gitts family for at least three generations, remembers

Marge was known for lemon pies that she made with giant lemons that grew on the Swan Island property.

She and Nicholas were great hosts, and it was always great walking with Nicholas (before his death in 2007) to see his extensive rows of seedlings. Their son Nick and late son Ted have kept up the family tradition, with their children and grandchildren. Swan Island always has the most beautiful dahlia catalog anywhere, and always has numerous new introductions.

All of us who knew her are richer for the experience, and all her friends and family mourn the loss of this very special woman.



*Photo: Bed Head*

From the Portland Dahlia Society:

Marge Gitts has been a promoter and proponent of the Portland Dahlia Society as long as I can remember. From a suggestion in the Swan Island catalog that those interested in dahlias join their local dahlia society, to spearheading our initial involvement in the annual Clackamas County Master Gardener's Spring Sale, this was Marge at work. It is no small accident that the ADS sanctioned Canby Trial ground is next to Swan Island's show garden and our membership is welcomed to Swan Island for our September meetings. Marge helped arrange the use of Swan Island's packing room for the twice annual PDS tuber packing work sessions. In earlier years, Marge participated in several ADS National Shows throughout the country meeting and greeting dahlia friends nationwide.

Rest in Peace, Marge Gitts, Dahlia Friend,  
Extraordinaire.