

# Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

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**Virtual Zoom Meeting, Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, 7:00 PM**

## MEMBERS ONLY SALES INFO

### Shopify website tuber sales:

The Shopify store for membership only will be open on April 5<sup>th</sup> through April 9<sup>th</sup>. This year all orders placed will be shipped to the address on the order.

A PDS presale discount coupon of 20% will be available (only during this time) to use that will lower the price and help pay for shipping. **A code will be sent to you via email.**

On Tuesday, April 13<sup>th</sup>, Shopify will be launched to the USA! Domestic shipping of tubers only – no international to Alaska or Hawaii. The base price for tubers will be \$5.00 each. **Some “more recent” varieties will have a higher set price and will be noted on the site.**

Dahlias of Today 2021 & 2020 (\$15.00) & Dahlias, a Monthly Guide (\$5.00) will also be available for purchase on Shopify website. No discount will be available.

### Dahlia tuber packing parties:

Our PDS will not be holding our April tuber sale at Oaks Park this year, but will again sell tubers on the Shopify website. To prepare for the Shopify launch, packing parties will be held on Sat., April 3<sup>rd</sup> and April 10<sup>th</sup>, at morning (9am to 12pm), and afternoon (1pm to 4pm) shifts. To reserve your space, please call 503-246-8632 or email [shirleybankston@gmail.com](mailto:shirleybankston@gmail.com). You can bring your donated tubers with you, too. Plastic bags will be provided.

If you are unable to attend a packing party and want to donate tubers, please bring them to Shirley Bankston's (SW Portland) or Larry Smith's home (SE Portland). Call Shirley at 503-246-8632 for information and travel directions.

Shirley will print labels for each bagged tuber. Please send your inventory list to [shirleybankston@gmail.com](mailto:shirleybankston@gmail.com).

For members working at the packing party you will receive 1 free tuber and can purchase up to 5 tubers @ \$4.00 each. Cash or check only.

Thanks, Shirley

## APRIL MEETING PROGRAM

- 1) Quick Hacks & Questions while we start up.
- 2) Terry Smith tribute.
- 3) Do any previous presenters want to give any updates? Maybe a short Q&A follow time slot for the 'starting from seeds', 'starting from cuttings' topics, etc.
- 4) Tuber Wake Up call  
Mark's 10 minute video on waking up tubers/taking cuttings.
- 5) "what are you doing in your dahlia garden now?"
- 6) How I Plan My Garden (Eric Toedtli).
- 7) 1 1/2 minute video for the Shopify sale, which would promote that.
- 8) Update on National Convention (Show Theme?)
- 9) Pest of the Month if we have time: (slugs).

Zoom Invite at the end of this Bulletin



18<sup>th</sup> Surgical Hospital B SC V

## IS pH MORE IMPORTANT THAN FERTILIZER?

By **TED J. KENNEDY**

People new to growing dahlias tend to ask the same questions. One of the most common questions is “What kind of fertilizer should I use on my dahlias?” As with any other subject, people that are just starting out really do not know what questions to ask. I say that same

person should be asking what is the best pH for my garden soil and how can I correct it if it is wrong? People have heard of the term pH but it is a mysterious term that sounds very chemical in nature and inapplicable to gardening.

Dahlias need to be grown in soil that has the correct pH. In Western Oregon, nearly everybody has acidic soil. The pH scale is backwards in my mind and the lower the number, the more acid is your soil. For some reason neutral on the pH scale is 7 and I seldom hear of anybody that has pH of 7 or higher. And let's cut to the meat of this discussion: What pH is best for dahlias? There is the short answer, the long answer and the "kiss" (keep it simple stupid) answer.

Short answer: 6.3

Long answer: Some people argue that a higher pH up to about 6.7 is best, while others consider anything over 6.0 to be very good. I like 6.3.

Kiss answer: any pH number that starts with 6 is probably good enough.

And why is the pH important? Plants find it difficult to take up fertilizer and minor nutrients when the pH is wrong. For example, if the pH is at 5.5, plants can be starved of nutrients despite the fact you are feeding them well. It is a sliding scale and the ideal number is the slightly acidic range in the sixes.

How do we correct overly acid soil here in Western Oregon? Agricultural lime is the answer and it consists mainly of calcium carbonate. It is an organic product that is just ground rock. The Rocky Mountains have huge deposits of limestone. The biggest use for limestone is for Portland Cement that is in fact cooked limestone.

The limestone rock is ground into a powder for "ag lime". The finer it is ground the quicker it dissolves and activates in the garden. Years ago, ag lime was a coarse powder that took many months to activate. Nowadays, they sell "prilled" lime that is super fine powder that is sprayed with a binder so you can spread easily without a huge cloud of dust and it takes effect in weeks instead of months. It is about \$9.00 for 50 pounds of prilled lime. There is another ag lime product called Dolomite lime and it differs only in that this ag lime has considerable magnesium in it. If your garden is deficient in magnesium, the soil test people will advise the use of dolomite lime to increase the magnesium levels. If you have sufficient magnesium in your soil, you should avoid using Dolomite lime as too much magnesium is not good. By the way, the regular ag lime has some magnesium in it too and that may well be all you need.

How much lime do I need to add to the soil? There are charts available and if you get a soil test they will give you exact recommendations. The amount is usually more than you think, lots more than adding fertilizer.

Does the soil change in pH from year to year? Fertilizer

is generally acidic and if you fertilize, your soil will become more acidic, especially after several years. There is also a "native" pH level that may be too acidic for dahlias and as the effects of lime wear off, the soil will try to return to that native pH level. Organic growers are less affected by pH changes but since they are trying to feed plants with organic products, it is really important the pH be ideal.

Can I use a soil pH meter to determine the pH of my soil? The Portland Dahlia Society owns a \$100.00 pH meter that we loan to club members. I like to borrow it every few years and take many readings and map where I need more lime. Meters are not as accurate as the soil test results that you get as they actually use a chemical test to determine how much lime you need. Typically, the soil test numbers will be slightly different from the meter and usually the actual number indicated by the soil test is more acidic than the meter's readings.

How often do I need to add lime as it is heavy and it is a laborious activity? They used to say every few years, but they were using old fashioned agricultural lime not prilled lime. Old fashioned lime dissolved over a longer period of years. One commercial grower puts down a small amount every year to avoid the laborious task of spreading a huge amount every few years. I do that too and I add my prilled lime in early spring every year. Here is a chart to use if you did not get a soil test.

So is pH more important than fertilizer? Actually, probably not but it is still very important.

Some more minutia: My son the chemist says that soil pH meters work well only to give a very approximate reading. He says they are designed to be most accurate near the number 7 that we seldom encounter and are inaccurate below the 6 level probably giving you a higher number and that is not good. So if you use a meter, especially the cheaper ones, you will think your pH level is better than it really is.

One commercial grower, neglected his soil pH and decided that he would just give the plants a little more fertilizer to make up for it. He increased his fertilizer each year for several years and finally his soil was at 5.5 pH and he decided to put down some lime. Of course, his garden did better the next year.

There is a limit on how much lime you can add to increase your pH if your soil is very, very acidic. Apparently, too much of a good thing can be a bad thing. One source says: "Never add more than 50 pounds of lime per 1,000 square feet in a single application."

The late Bill Mishler knew his soil was very acidic. He was a very frugal person and for example drove a VW Rabbit diesel pick up, that had no power or air conditioning but got great gas mileage. He and Phil Mingus found a cheap source of lime at a lime manufacturing plant. They had a real deal on lime if you loaded it yourself into your pick up and as they say it

