

Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

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

Website: portlanddahlia.com

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Next meeting Tuesday, July 12th, 2016 @ 7:30 PM

COOKIES FOR JULY

Cookie hosts for July are Linda Taylor and Mark and Laura Oldenkamp. Please check the sign-in table for an opportunity to sign up for August cookie-treat hosts.

PROGRAM FOR JULY

Our program for July will feature a presentation on how to grow good cut flowers and which varieties work as proven cut flower winners. We will also discuss photo competitions and how best to enter.

The remainder of the program will center on a topic which generates lots of interest. How to go about crossing and saving seed for next year's crop of seedlings. What seem to work well as far as matching seed and pollen parents? How to keep rot from ruining the seed heads? What seems to work better, open bee pollination or hand crosses? Ted Kennedy will lead this panel discussion.

HOW DO I FERTILIZE MY DAHLIAS By Ted Kennedy

Sometimes the shortest, most basic questions are the most difficult to answer. Rather than just saying how I do it, here are some ideas from other growers.

One club member got a soil analysis to determine what his garden needed. He has always used a lot of organic compost and a bit of sheep manure on his garden. In addition he has used commercial garden fertilizers such as 10-20-20 and 16-16-16 in the past. His soil report indicated that he needed only nitrogen and he decided to buy a time release product that only has nitrogen. I believe he bought a product called *Nitroform* and it is 38% nitrogen

Another member of the club is strictly an organic gardener who uses lots of compost along with such products as bat guano, blood meal and green sand. Such products are available at Concentrates in Milwaukie on International Way. Peruse their offerings at

<http://concentratesnw.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/Concentrates-Order-Form.pdf>

Concentrates offers 10% discounts on most items to Portland Dahlia Society Members. Be sure to mention that you are a member to receive the discount. Other organic choices include alfalfa and chicken manure. An English grower swore by cow manure and added a full six inches to his garden every year. The dahlias grew wonderfully, but in the long run the high nitrogen content and probably high levels of bacteria and soil fungi caused the tubers to rot in storage. That did not deter him and he kept pot tubers of all his dahlia varieties and planted rooted cuttings from them.



Hollyhill Serenity – WL LB

One grower in the Seattle area who has won very many best in show awards uses the very best Osmocote fertilizer. I was told that she uses the product that has an 8 to 9 month dissipation rate and an analysis of 13-13-13 and includes micronutrients. There are numerous choices in the Osmocote line but the biggest drawback is the expense. I have been told it runs about \$1.00 per pound, even in the 50 pound bags. Osmocote releases all of the plant nutrients slowly along with all of the trace nutrients throughout the entire growing season. This should not be confused with some cheaper products that

release only the nitrogen slowly and really over-dose the plants with phosphorus and potassium when first applied.

One grower now deceased grew dahlias on the coast in sandy soil. She swore by chicken manure and a product derived from seaweed (probably no longer available). That seaweed product probably provided micro-nutrients and some potassium. By the way, the word potassium derives from potash and that was produced by burning seaweed to produce a nutrient laden ash. Later, chemists determined that the potash was mostly one chemical element and named it potassium.



Myrtle's Folly – Flower of the Year

Another grower in Washington swore by the liquid fish products that he sprayed on the plants. Fish fertilizer used to be very popular but its downfall was that it smelled so bad. There are fish pellets being sold as a time release fertilizer for organic gardeners. Their drawback is that dogs and other animals like to eat them and will dig them out of the soil.

In our area it is necessary to add lime to the soil to maintain proper pH. Lime is not technically a fertilizer but it sure works to make your flowers grow. If the soil has the proper pH, the plants can utilize the nutrients in the soil. One needs to test the pH of your garden and lime regularly to keep the pH at proper levels. It should be noted that commercial fertilizers tend to make the soil more acid. If you have been adding only fertilizer and no lime to your garden, you have probably made the soil acid (reduced the pH number, over 6.0 is needed for dahlias and 6.5 is considered ideal). There is a chart on a university web page that showed how much each fertilizer component acidified the soil. For example, for every 100 pounds of urea (46% nitrogen, very common ingredient in fertilizer), you add to your soil, you need to add 71 pounds of lime to keep the soil pH the same.

Many dahlia growers like to use the water soluble products such as Miracle Grow to fertilize their dahlias. These products can be applied with a hose end sprayer and the product is sprayed on the foliage on a weekly basis. A more economical alternative to Miracle Grow is the use of commercial greenhouse fertilizers such as Peters or Plant Marvel 20-20-20 that cost about \$25 for a 25 pound bag. All of these products have the advantage of giving the plants a feeding of fertilizer that takes effect almost immediately. These products are very useful in hot weather, when dahlias seem to have problems getting enough fertilizer from the soil.

JULY IN THE GARDEN

Besides fertilizing, spraying, tying, topping, disbranching, disbudding, and irrigating (my, we are a busy lot!), one needs to consider the benefits of mulching and with what type mulching of material. Mulching benefits plants in three ways. By shading the soil, mulch keeps the soil cooler and reduces moisture evaporation. Thick mulch discourages weed growth. And finally, most organic mulches provide some plant nutrients and over time improve the texture and water retention capacity of the soil.

Nearly ideal mulch is of your own making. This way you are sure of not having any residual herbicides in your compost/mulch. The presence of herbicides in manures, compost and mulch has recently become a hot topic for dahlia growers. Dahlias are very sensitive to these herbicides and result in distorted and misshapen growth at the tips of branches. One grower from Washington State recently experienced herbicidal damage from mushroom compost. The only remedy is to haul off the contaminated material. What an expensive and heart breaking experience!

Another thought for mulch would be grass clippings (sans Weed and Feed only). When applying any mulch be careful not to smother the dahlia stalks. Remember it is a soil blanket, not a plant blanket. Still another option would be straw, hay or alfalfa. If you check Craig's List Portland under farm and garden and then search for hay or alfalfa you will see some sources which sell by the bale. Alfalfa pellets are also available from Concentrates for \$14 for a 40lb bag.

Another type of mulch is the in-organic type. Here I'm thinking of "landscape fabric". The landscape fabric is porous enough to let water, nutrients and air through and yet forms an effective weed barrier. It is sold by the lineal foot at most garden centers. Other types of barriers; e.g., layers of newspapers or black plastic are not recommended since they generally don't allow good moisture and air exchange with the soil.

Side dressing the plants with fertilizer is generally done in June or early July. Be sure to place the fertilizer no

closer than around the drip line of the plants and in all instances at least 6" away from the dahlia stalk. Growers that continue to side dress later than mid July run the risk of causing an increased incidence of oblong, double, misshapen or "bull" centers.

Into every garden a little rain must fall.

This is great for plant growth, but sadly promotes some fungus diseases. Powdery Mildew (as well as other fungus diseases) is much easier to prevent than to cure. Organic preventatives include 1 Tbs. Baking Soda with 1 tsp. Ivory Liquid in 1 gallon water sprayed on the garden weekly. Another is skim milk with the same spreader-sticker (Ivory). Home garden approved chemicals include Daconil, which is available at most garden centers like Home Depot. Good garden sanitation seems to help. Also take a look at other vegetation around the dahlia plot. Does it show evidence of mildew? If so, consider treating it along with the dahlias. Dahlia Smut seems more active this year. It starts out as lighter discolorations in round circles on the leaves, looking almost like mosaic virus. Later, these circles in the leaves completely rot through leaving a "shot hole" perforation in the leaves. Daconil seems to be the best control. Best photo I could find on the net is at the below link. Be sure to scroll all the way down to find the two photos of early and advanced infection.

<http://www.kesdahlias.co.uk/2005thoughts.htm>

Some growers like to combine insecticides and fungicides. This is a great timesaver and a good idea as long as both labels say this is permissible. Still others have been known to combine liquid fertilizer with insecticides or fungicides. My experience has been this combination sometimes will cause some leaf burn. Saying this another way...if you are experiencing leaf burn with a combination fertilizer-insecticide spray, you might want to try applying your liquid feeding separately from your other garden chemicals. For years I was kidding myself and blaming the burning on relatively high daytime temperatures. Applying separately solved the leaf burn problem. Be sure to thoroughly shower after using garden chemicals.

Dahlia Shows **by Ted J. Kennedy**

I remember the first dahlia show my wife and I went to in about 1989. We were aware that dahlia fanatics conducted a show where they displayed their best blooms to win ribbons but we were not caught up in dahlia fever in those days. We went because we sold some cut flowers from our newly purchased acreage and we wanted to see the dahlia varieties that may have been suitable for cut flower sales. We had little interest in Giant sized dahlias but that was the year that the dark giant called Zorro hit the show scene. Seeing the huge flowers staged in single and triple entries was really impressive. We wrote down numerous dahlia varieties to

try the next year and remarked that those dahlia fanatics were way over the top.



Mignon Single: Lo-Blush

Flower shows seem to be an American and British tradition. For some reason, rose people have rose shows; orchid people, orchid shows; and iris and chrysanthemum and undoubtedly many others, all seem to enjoy the competition involved in showing off their spectacular blooms. And then there are the Fairs where fruits, vegetables and flowers compete for prizes. Dahlias shows fill the need for the dahlia aficionados to display and share the flowers that they have enjoyed in their yard and to compete for prizes and awards.

If you have never attended or entered a dahlia show the first and most important fact is that attendance and entry in the show is FREE. Let me repeat that important fact: you can see our dahlia show and park for FREE. In fact, if you come on the second day, when the show is being taken down, you may even get some free flowers to take home with you. So if you have never attended a dahlia show, "free is a very good price" to quote the appliance huckster Tom Peterson.

And entry of blooms in the show is FREE. And if you win at the show you get ribbons and in many cases, cash prizes and perhaps other prizes like dahlia medals or vases or gift certificates. In fact, I have seen some of the more successful exhibitors take home as much as \$200- in cash prizes along with a bunch of ribbons. You may ask: Where does the money come from to support the awards? Our Portland Dahlia Society has two major dahlia tuber sales each year where we sell donated tubers. These fund raisers finance all of the clubs activities. Also, the whole purpose of our non profit club is to promote and share the growing and appreciation of our favorite flower, the dahlia. Traditionally, the flower shows have filled the need of displaying our favorite flower in the best of all circumstances in a place where

anyone can come and enjoy them.

So, please come to our annual show that is held August 27th and 28th at Oak's Park. You will not be disappointed. And if you enjoy a little competition, why not enter some blooms.

MIGNON, POM, CACTUS?

By Ted J. Kennedy

People love to categorize everything and dahlias have suffered the same fate as most things. Usually when items are placed into categories, there is at least a little logic in the naming scheme. Roses have their Hybrid Teas, Grandifloras, Floribundas and Polyanthas and I am sure that the logic of those names is at least historical if not descriptive.

And dahlias too have been categorized into descriptive categories with rather obscure names: Mignon, Pom, and Cactus are three that impress me as being particularly obscure.

We are all probably not too familiar with that most uncommon word: mignon. As I type it into the word processor it is so uncommon that it is underlined in red as a misspelled word. But of course it is not all that uncommon as it is part of the name of our favorite beef steak the filet mignon. And what does a beef steak have to do with our mignon single dahlias? As it turns out, mignon is a French term that translates as "delicately small and pretty". So in regards to beef steak it is one that is small and the "pretty" must mean "pretty good". Another word that could have been used as a synonym for mignon is "dainty". Guess what, the definition of dainty is "delicately small and pretty" the same as mignon. I rather like the sound of "dainty dahlias" but we will continue to have Mignon dahlias.

Ball dahlias, miniature ball dahlias and pompon dahlias. We all know these dahlias all have the same formation but differ only in size. It appears that when you have very small ball dahlia that the word "ball" is no longer descriptive enough. So we have pompon dahlias. Again the word is French in origins. It is spelled many ways: pom-pon, pompom or pompon but pompon is our spelling. I believe it was French word for a: "decoration consisting of a ball of tufted wool or silk; usually worn on a hat". For most of us who have grown dahlias for several years, we have shortened the word to pom and the plural poms. I believe that we will be calling these "micro balls" pompons for some time. I suppose that is as good name as I can think of but "tiny balls" sort of appeals to me.

And then we have cactus dahlias. This one goes way back to the 1800s when a dahlia was imported into Europe that had ray florets that were long and skinny. No one seems to know where it came from but it brought with it the genetic material to create our cactus, incurved cactus and semi cactus types. But that does not answer the question of why they are called "cactus". In my etymological research*, I discovered that the word cactus was used for a plant called cardoon, a member of the artichoke family. And the flower of the cardoon is what we would call in dahlia terms a cactus, long rolled florets. Could that explain how our cactus dahlias got their name?

To summarize, it was very possible that when these dahlia names were created that they could have been: Dainty dahlias, tiny ball dahlias and cardoon dahlias.

*Merriam-Webster: Origin of CACTUS New Latin, genus name, from Latin, cardoon, from Greek kaktos
First Known Use: 1767



Cardoon Flower