

# Portland Dahlia Society Bulletin

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

Editor: Mike Riordan (503)256-0425 Contacts: Teresa Bergman (360) 274-8292, Ted Kennedy [e4449@aol.com](mailto:e4449@aol.com)

**Next meeting Tuesday, May 10th, 2016 @ 7:30 PM**

## SOCIETY SALES EVENTS

Treasurer Larry Sawyer will have a complete financial report at the May meeting. Preliminary figures look like we are close to budget. Thanks to the many tuber donors. Thanks to all the volunteers who helped at the preparation workshops and a huge thanks to the Gitts Family and Swan Island Dahlias for the use of their facilities for packaging and generous donation of tubers and packaging supplies. Special thanks to those that helped with clean-up of the hall and fair grounds after the sales. My apologies to anyone not mentioned and mega thanks to everyone who helped make these sales a success.

## COOKIES FOR MAY

Cookie bakers for May are Larry Smith and Gordon Jackman. Since we anticipate a good number of people for the Plant and tuber close out sale, could some members help with a few more cookies? Many donors make for a sweet refreshment interlude.

## PROGRAM FOR MAY

Our May program will feature the final sale of the remaining tubers after the Master Gardeners' Sale. (As and if available). Tuber selection might not be great, but close out pricing promises to be rock bottom!

Each year many of our members take cuttings of the newer more desirable varieties. This year our members will be donating a few of their green plant crop to our plant auction. This year we again plan to project digital images of the new offerings. Teresa Bergman has again consented to handle this task using the society's digital projector. Could those members bringing plants e-mail Teresa with a list of what you are bringing? Teresa's e-mail address is: [larryteresa@msn.com](mailto:larryteresa@msn.com) If you have a superior digital image of the variety could you e-mail it to Teresa as well?

We will also have a discussion about planting, staking, fertilizing and tying dahlias and the upcoming growing season.



*Hapet Skyline*

## SOME THOUGHTS ON GROWING DAHLIAS IN THE PORTLAND AREA By Ted Kennedy

When should I plant my dahlias?

The classic answer to that question has been Mother's Day or about May 10<sup>th</sup>. The soil is warm and dry enough to work and the tubers or plants will grow very fast. Having said that, I know people who plant much earlier, perhaps planting as early as April 15<sup>th</sup> or so. Frost has occurred as late as April 22<sup>nd</sup> at my house. Even if it does not frost, the soil is cold and wet. Tuber rot becomes a real issue under such conditions. Another reason not to plant early is the risk that there will be a rainy period after you plant and the weeds will grow very fast and you cannot get out there and weed. There is no reason to plant rooted cuttings until the last frost date is behind us and again the best date to plant them is right around May 10<sup>th</sup>.

But how late can I plant dahlias and have them bloom?

One of our club members has been known to plant as late as July 1<sup>st</sup> because the soil has been very wet where she plants. I would advise people to plant before June 15<sup>th</sup> if at all possible. I personally try to get everything planted before June 1<sup>st</sup>.

How deep should I bury my tubers?

I put them under about six inches of soil. One club member likes to plant eight inches deep and he says it helps the plant produce more tubers. Some others start out at four to five inches and mound some soil around the sprouts when they come up, much as people mound the soil around potatoes.

I have some rooted cuttings. How deep should I plant them?

I plant them a few inches deeper than what they were in the pot so that the plant will grow some tubers along the stalk. If the plant is really tall it can be planted in a slanted hole (trench). If you plant too deep (more than seven or eight inches), the soil is colder and the plant may not grow as well.

What is the most important thing to do after I have planted my tubers and plants?

Make *sure* that you have controlled the slug population in your garden. Slugs are the number one enemy of dahlias early in the season and will eat the sprouts as they come up. They will sometimes even burrow down into the ground to live right on top of your tuber and the tuber will never seem to sprout. I have found too that the baby slugs are the worst, as there are so many of them and they grow really fast. Do whatever you can to control the slugs early in the season. Surprisingly, once the plants are two feet tall or so, slugs do not bother them.

## CARE OF GREEN PLANTS

It is best to set them out in the cool of the day although this is not absolutely necessary. Shading them with a couple of shingles or an inverted peach basket for a few days will aid them in getting off to a good start. Do not be afraid of them. They are very much like a tomato plant in their requirements and the way they should be handled. If they were very dry when received submerging the ball of soil in a pail of water until all air bubbles cease to rise before planting them out will prove beneficial. Examine the ball of soil and if it is found that the roots have become pot-bound; i.e., the roots have become crowded and have started to circle around the outside of the ball, all soil should be washed off and the roots spread out in the hole before covering them up. If

this is not done, proper development of the tubers is hindered and they are apt to be so badly twisted together when dug that it will be almost impossible to divide them without heavy loss. Another reason for this treatment is that if not done the roots may continue to grow in a tight mass and not spread out far enough to procure the necessary food and moisture. The result is a stunted plant.

Cover the roots and partly fill the hole with soil, firming it well around them but leaving a depression or cup which may be filled with water. The hole should be filled in as soon as the water has soaked away. A small amount of fertilizer dissolved in this water, any of the starter solutions recommended for use with tomato plants, or a B1 solution, will aid the plants in getting off to an early start. It will pay to water the plants the day before setting out with a like solution giving them an added pickup to counteract the shock of being transplanted.



*Hollyhill Jitterbug, 2016 ADS Medal Winner*

Green plants should receive steady cultivation from the time they are set out to promote steady growth. As they are unlike tubers in having a root system already formed they should be watered occasionally if the weather is at all dry. With a green plant both a root system and a top growth have been developed when set out and that top growth must have both food and water if it is to be kept growing steadily. Most failures from green plants are due to lack of care in their early growth, allowing the plant to harden and really stunting it. If this happens it will pay to cut the top off above the lower leaves and get a new growth started.

After the plants have become established the top should be pinched out to promote more bushy growth. If the plant tends to be tall and leggy it may be advisable to cut it back far enough so that only a couple of sets of leaves are left.

## PLANTING AND ALLIED SUBJECTS

In selecting tubers for planting, small ones are preferable. The eyes are nearly all on the crown where the tuber is attached to the stalk. The main body of the tuber merely serves as storehouse for food to supply the young plants until it can develop feed roots of its own. Planting a large tuber is simply supplying the young plant with an overabundance of food and tends to discourage it from developing a good supply of feeder roots of its own. If one has to use a large tuber, part should be removed and the cut surface dusted with sulfur before planting.

The previous two items are excerpts from *Practical Dahlia Culture* published by the Portland Dahlia Society in 1946.



*Hy Debut*

## THOUGHTS ON THIS SEASON

Late April and early May seem to be shaping up to be a mixture of warm and wet.

Maybe we will be able to start working the ground soon. My guess is that we are still in store for some relatively cold and wet weather during parts of May and June. Stay tuned.

When can the ground be worked? Try hand working a few areas. How does the soil cling together? If the soil seems tight and adobe like, with water puddling in the bottom of the excavation, you need to let it dry out more. If in a week to ten days, the tops of hand turned soil look a bit dry, take another look. Try loosely packing a ball of earth in your hand then drop it to the ground from hip high. If it breaks up on impact, your soil may be ready to till. What needs to be avoided is soil compaction caused by roto-tilling soil that is too wet. If you see you are creating a gummy goeey mess, STOP! Revisit and re-evaluate your situation after ten days of relatively dry weather.

Dahlias are a resilient species. In late June and July they can easily make up for lost time in a hurry. Better to have them in a little late, than succumb to rot in cold wet soil.

What causes the new growth on my dahlias to be yellow or lighter green in color? Generally, this is the plants reaction to colder night time temperatures. You will see that different varieties display this characteristic to varying degrees. This yellow coloration is not permanent and the plants will gradually grow out of it.

Do you have some clumps left in the ground from last year? If they are in a well drained location like you would find near the eves of your home, they might now be coming up. If you would like to dig them up, divide and replant them this can be done all at once. Just make sure that each tuber you replant has a sprout or some growth. If you do this a little later in the season with some green growth on the plant, this is not a problem. After you have lifted the clump, carefully work your spade from the *underside* of your clump to make your divisions. Next replant your divided starts. You will encounter some wilting which can be mitigated by shading with a piece of cardboard staked vertically on the South side of the plant. (Easier to find than a peach basket) After moving to the new location, the wilting should go away in about ten to fourteen days. Do not attempt to compensate for the wilting by over watering. This will only encourage tuber rot. Once the feeder roots begin to re-establish themselves in the new location, all will be well.

Good luck and best wishes in all your gardening endeavors!



## **DAHLIA POT TUBERS HOW AND WHY By Ted J. Kennedy**

In the USA most people grow dahlias from plant divisions called tubers. Dahlia plants form tubers under the soil and a typical plant has 3 to 7 or more tubers that are about the size of an elongated chicken's egg. The ability to form larger and easily stored tubers is genetically driven and some excellent dahlia varieties do not make tubers that store well. Dahlia enthusiasts have determined that in order to keep over such varieties, that they can take a cutting from the plant and root it and then grow it on in a small pot (2.5 to 6 inches in diameter) containing potting soil. The plant is left in this small pot the entire growing season and the plant will fill the pot with a very small tuber clump. This small clump for unknown reasons will store more easily than tubers. These small clumps are stored either in the pots or removed from the pots to store them over the Winter. In the Spring they are used to sprout more cutting material for plants that are either planted in the garden or are left in the pots to make more pot tubers to continue the cycle. You can also plant the pot tubers in the garden just like you would plant a tuber. By the way, the pot tuber plants are not grown for their blooms although an occasional one will have a smaller bloom. The small potted plants for pot tubers can be grown on the surface of the ground or slightly buried in the ground, crowded very closely or grown above the ground on a bench or table. Pot tubers grown in the ground make bigger tuber clumps and need less watering. However, it takes much more effort to harvest them as the feeder roots will grow into the soil below the pots.

Many growers, like to use pot tubers to grow sprouts for cuttings because pot tubers produce more sprouts than individual tubers. That is because there are more eyes in the small pot tuber and each eye can generate sprouts. A tuber may produce up to about ten usable sprouts whereas a pot tuber may produce at least double that.

Pot tubers should not be confused with Dutch grown tuber clumps sold in stores and nurseries. They grow dahlias from cuttings and plant them in the ground and crowd them together so closely in the rows that the plants never grow very large but do form small tuber clumps. They mechanically harvest these small clumps and package and sell

them all over the world. The Dutch clumps are small but are not constricted by a pot and are not the same as pot tubers.

## **IN MEMORY OF RON WILKES, FRIEND FROM AUSTRALIA By Col McLaughlin**

In a year of too many such notices, it is with regret that I advise the passing of former QDS member Ron Wilkes of Goulburn at the age of 84. He served as distributor of the ADC, the forerunner to the current DSA, for a number of years. As such, he was a staunch supporter of national conferences and was a regular attendee, though maintaining a low profile. The current 1998 dahlia standards were produced under his patient leadership. He was an avid grower, exhibitor, judge, and breeder of dahlias. His raisings were released, or I should say freely given under the prefix of Araluen. My personal favourite was the lolly pink medium cactus Araluen Joy. He was a trail blazer as far as travelling long distances to exhibit was concerned. He frequently exhibited in Melbourne and Adelaide and on one occasion in our state Queensland at Caboolture. His trusty Falcon would be packed with quality competitive blooms grown under shade cloth in Goulburn. He grew all types, but took it upon himself to promote and lesser types.

He had a fascination with the USA and made multiple trips over in dahlia season of course. He was the conduit through which many Aussie-bred varieties reached the states, for example Peach Delight. By occupation he was a train driver, firstly on the NSW north coast then latterly based in Goulburn. His wife Elizabeth predeceased him a number of years ago. He was community minded and until ill health forced him to retire, voluntarily transported local residents to Canberra and back for medical treatment. RIP Ron Wilkes.

*Editor's note: Ron Wiles was the guest of Shirley Bankson, Arnie Klug, Teresa Bergman, Wayne and Eleanor Shantz, Max Ollieu, Mike Riordan and other friends on one or more of his visits to the Pacific Northwest. Col McLaughlin writes as Ron's friend and fellow dahlia society member in Australia.*