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, November 8th, 2016 @ 7:30 p.m.

MONTHLY CLUMP AUCTION

Our November meeting will feature a continuation of the "silent auction" of undivided clumps. If you have extra stock you think other members might like, please bring the November meeting. This fundraiser stimulated lots of interest and competitive bidding last month.

ANNUAL PHOTO CONTEST

Part of our program for November will be our annual photo competition. Photos may be either conventional prints from film or prints of digital images. The competition will be divided into three categories: 1) Photos of dahlia blooms, 2) Dahlia blooms with people or critters, and 3) Dahlias in landscapes or garden scenes. There will be a ten dollar prize for each category and the best of all three categories will receive an additional ten dollars. Please bring your photos in prior to the start of the meeting. There will be time for viewing and judging during the refreshment break. The judges will announce the winners and award the prizes prior to the conclusion of the meeting.

We will also have a demonstration on dividing. Please feel free to bring a clump in to have it participate in a hands on demonstration.

COOKIES NOVEMBER

Cookie hosts for November are the three musketeers: Nan, Kathy and Leslie.

2017 DUES ARE SOON DUE

Why not take care of this now and get it out of the way? Judges please remember that you are required to carry membership in both the American Dahlia society and the PNDC (Pacific Northwest Dahlia Conference). PDS dues, ADS dues and PNDC dues should be combined and paid to the Treasurer as noted below. Federation of Northwest Dahlia Growers dues are $10 and also payable through our Treasurer.

PDS	ADS	PNDC
Adults: $7.00 Couples: $10.00 Juniors: $1.00	Individual: $24.00 Family: $27.00 Add $8-Snowbirds	Individual $10.00 Dual: $15.00
Mail to or pay at next meeting		
Larry Sawyer, 11015 S.W. Berkshire, Portland, OR 97225		

STORING DAHLIA TUBERS
By Ted J. Kennedy

A discussion on storing dahlia tubers for the more experienced grower.

Over the years, I have seen numerous discussions on how someone successfully stored their tubers using a particular method. Then the next year or two later someone else tried this same method and it supposedly it failed for that person. I have found that there are many factors that people may overlook concerning the storage of dahlia tubers:

(1) Variety related issues; many varieties are prone to loss in storage. Barbarry Bingo is a wonderful dahlia and an extremely poor keeper. Mingus Nicole is also very difficult to keep over. Why do these varieties fail to store well? They appear to make reasonably good looking tubers. It is my belief that both of them are susceptible to fungus infections that cause the tubers to rot. It may well be that the infection affects the entire plant before the tubers are dug and that very little can be done with fungicide treatments after digging and dividing. Or, maybe it is just plain bad genetics. These varieties may not have the ability to go "dormant" in storage conditions. So, when you compare storage methods one must take into consideration what varieties are being stored.

(2) Very few people talk about the actual temperature and humidity levels in their storage area. Temperature is an interesting issue. If a dahlia tuber has been properly prepared for storage, dahlias can be stored at just about any temperature above freezing. But, the storage

temperature has a lot to do with the growth of insects and fungus. Insects do not generally thrive in cool temperatures. There needs to be some research done on temperature as it affects these vectors. Humidity in the storage area is also another factor that no one seems to talk about. Some areas are more humid and some climates are more humid during the winter. I know of one grower who believes his overly humid storage area causes rot and has installed a dehumidifier there. In the Northwest, more tubers are lost to too wet storage than too dry. In climates with drier winters, there may some risk of too dry tubers. All in all, a little bit of too dry is probably better than a little bit of too wet.

(3) Tubers that are not "ripe". In many show gardens, dahlias are grown with a more than an ample supply of nutrients and water. When harvest time comes in the fall, the plants are still growing and the newly formed tubers are not good candidates for storage. They can be identified by their nearly transparent skin and the fact that they are still rather skinny. Unripe dahlia tubers do not store well. They are much more susceptible to bruising and their thin skin is easily damaged by handling and cleaning. When they are mixed in with the more mature tubers, they can spread rot to a tubers nearby. If you keep these tubers, store them in a separate bag or box.

(4) Broken necks. Many dahlia varieties have thin necks where the tuber attaches to the stem. If the neck is broken when you dig tubers, the tuber may look perfectly good but a very high percentage of these tubers (90% is good estimate) will rot or fail to sprout. Many varieties are notorious for having long slender tubers that easily get broken necks. Red Velvet and Jessica are two that come to mind. When digging these very long tubers, it may be better to trim them to shorter lengths as you dig them. A tuber with about 1/3 of its length cut off will store a lot better than a long skinny tuber with a broken neck.

AC Casper

(5) Curing of tubers before storage. I was surfing the internet and came across an article on how potato growers prepare their tubers for storage. There are numerous steps that they go through just to get the potatoes into a dormant stage. For example during digging and hauling to the storage area, potatoes are bruised and skin is damaged. Potatoes need to have some time (two to three weeks) in reasonably warm and dry conditions to heal these defects. Then they are slowly reduced in temperature before going into storage. Do these steps apply to dahlias? I believe they do. After you harvest and divide tubers, they need to be in a special environment to heal and go into the dormant state. It should not be too humid or too dry. The tubers need to heal bruises and to have the skins thicken. When fully cured, storage success will be improved.

(6) How wet and cold is it when you are digging? In the Northwest, there may be weeks of rain during the digging season. In Montana, the humidity may be very low. Dahlias need to be handled differently in different conditions. In the Northwest, wet tuber clumps need to be divided very soon after digging. The wet tubers need to be dried before storage.

(7) Peat Moss, vermiculite, cedar shavings, newspaper, perforated plastic bags, small plastic bags, saran wrap, sand, wax, saw dust, etc. Dahlias have been successfully stored in all of these mediums and probably many more. The medium itself may not be the answer but how you use the medium. No one talks much about whether tubers are stored touching each other. I believe that separation of tubers from each other is as important as the storage medium. For example, vermiculite can be used to separate the tubers in the storage container. Saran wrap and the like does the same job with much reduced storage space. Separation of tubers and the preservation of proper moisture in storage are key factors. But when using any of the storage methods, a rotten tuber can create problems for other tubers in storage. It produces excess moisture and even some gases that affect tubers in the same area. Rotten tubers probably attract insects.

Rotten tubers can harbor secondary bacterial and fungus that can spread to adjacent tubers. A good practice is to check tubers in storage several times during the winter and to remove rotting tubers.

(8) Little attention is given to insect damage in storage. Very small insects such as fungus gnats and spring tails lay eggs in tubers and the larva eat tuber parts. The green eye is very susceptible to such damage. Prevention of infection is a good practice. If the weather is warm when digging, be aware of small flying insects. Do not dry tuber clumps in an area such as a greenhouse where warm dry conditions encourage insects. Using an insecticide dip may be very helpful. One grower fumigates his storage area with flea bombs.

(9) Pot tubers are insurance. Many varieties that have poor keeping tubers can be grown as "pot tubers" and stored quite successfully. Generically, a pot tuber is an entire tuber clump of a dahlia that was grown in a pot the entire year. The size of the pot can range from a gallon pot all the way down to a 2 inch pot. The bigger the pot, the bigger clump will be. Commercial entities that sell pot tubers use small pots that are in the range of 3 to 6 inches in width. In the spring take a cutting or use a small tuber and grow it in a pot somewhere in your garden. It can be placed on the soil in the garden or grown on a table or bench. They just need regular water and a very little bit of liquid fertilizer. In the fall, harvest your pot tubers before the first frost as they are much more susceptible to freezing. Cut off the stem an inch or two above the pot and either store them in the pot or out of the pot. I store mine in the pots.

Hollyhill Black Widow

SOCIETY NOTES

November's meeting will be the last regular meeting for this year. We will get together the second Tuesday of December at our regular meeting spot for our annual Christmas Party. There will be a December issue of the Bulletin around the first of December. There will be no Bulletin or meeting for the month of January and our regular meeting and publication schedule will resume in February of 2017.

USING A COVER CROP ON YOUR DAHLIA GARDEN

By Ted J. Kennedy

About 10 years ago our supplier of horse manure told us that he had a bad back was no longer able to deliver manure to our garden. That next year we stopped adding manure to our garden and used a cover crop instead. We have not missed the manure and all the work it took to spread it. And it did not smell very good either!

For many years, we were able to buy a reasonably priced mixture of cover crop seeds at Wilco. It was a mixture of 50% Rye Grain and the other 50% consisted of field peas, vetch, clover, and for a while buckwheat. Recently, they have doubled the price and we decided to mix our own. Concentrates has a wonderful selection of cover crop seeds. They have them in bulk and you buy them by the pound. We plant about two pounds of cover crop per 1000 square feet.

Floater: Nick Sr.

Cover crop is also called "green manure" because it is tilled into the soil as you would manure. It provides organic material to the soil and if you grow legumes such as field peas, vetch or clover or fava beans, the plants provide nitrogen to the soil.

Some of the benefits include:
(1) **Soil improvement** from the formation of roots. Annual Rye sends down fibrous roots that break up the soil and go as deep as three feet to bring up nutrients. This prevents soil run off, erosion, and the plants hold the fertilizer that would be washed away during the winter.
(2) **Weed Control** The thick cover crop smothers weeds. Annual rye actually has some ability to prevent weeds from sprouting.
(3) **Fertilizer** Besides preserving fertilizers in the soil, the legumes actually add nitrogen to the soil.
(4) **Beneficial Insects** such as lady beetles or ground beetles, may be encouraged by planting cover crops. Certainly the worms love it.
(5) **Dry Soil in Spring** The cover crop makes the soil dryer in the spring.

(6) **Esthetics:** Margaret says it looks better than an ugly brown patch of dirt in your yard.

Zak's Lemon Zest

We are still using about 50% rye grain and the other 50% consists of field peas (the foliage is edible!), the vetch, and the crimson clover. I added a few seeds of the Kodiak mustard to see how it does this year. Here in the Portland area, you need to plant a cover crop in October or November (December can work too Rye as rye grain will sprout at temperatures as low as 40 degrees). But we tried planting it as a spring crop in February and it did not grow more than 18 inches tall by May 1st whereas our October planted areas were 5 feet tall by then. Planting is easy. After you dig the dahlias, just spread the seeds over the soil by hand. Then set your tiller at an inch or two and lightly till the seeds into the soil.

On about May 1st, we use our riding mower to mow down the cover crop and then till it into the soil. We have planted dahlias as early as the next day after tilling.

Editor's Note: Concentrates is an excellent source of cover crop seed sold by the pound. Vermiculite is also available in 2.5 cubic foot bags. They are located on International Way off the Milwaukie Expressway. They also offer a 10% discount to Portland Dahlias Society Members. Just bring in this bulletin as proof of membership. Here's a link to their website:
http://concentratesnw.com/
My fava beans and Mustard are already up! Mark Harvey of Old House Dahlias says he has had Kodiak Mustard germinate in January!

Hollyhill Cotton Candy

Election of Officers

At this month's meeting we will hold our biannual election of officers for the 2017-2018 seasons. Your nominating committee has put together the following slate:

President – Larry Smith
Co-Vice President – Laura Oldenkamp
Co-Vice President – Nan Hage
Recording Secretary – Adrienne Hale
Corresponding Secretary – Ted Kennedy
Treasurer – Larry Sawyer

We also need someone to step up to work with Larry Sawyer as Treasurer in training, as this is the last cycle he will be able to serve.

Our by-laws also allow for nominations from the floor. Anyone so nominated must be present and indicate a willingness to serve if elected.